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University of Surrey  
Department of Dance Studies  
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A Theory and Practice of Choreography  
towards Overcoming Eurocentrism  
- the case of South Korean dance -

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## ABSTRACT

South Korea has, throughout the twentieth century, been subject to three distinct powers: Japanese colonialism, authoritarianism and, at the end of the century, democracy. Each of these forms of government has had a direct impact on Korea's cultural development. For dance, that has meant either the banning of traditional practices and the mass import of western forms by the Japanese or the use of these same traditional forms as part of the widespread political backlash against authoritarianism. Today, many Korean artists express concern with what they see as the demise of indigenous dance practice due to the continual influx and promotion of western methods into higher-educational establishments. As an antidote, many practitioners are now adopting what could be described as an 'anti-Eurocentric' policy in order to re-discover a dance culture unique to South Korea.

Focusing on four contemporary Korean choreographers, this exposition is an examination of to what extent, and in what ways, an indigenous dance culture has been realised. Set against a backdrop of twentieth century Korean history and read through the lens of both eastern and western dance theory, this thesis consists of a series of close analyses of dance works. Of concern is in what ways both western and eastern dance traditions have been incorporated into and shaped choreographic practice. This focus on detailed and contextualised analyses reveals that, contrary to any preconceived notion of a singular anti-Eurocentric and 'pro-Korean' style, there exists a wide range of practices. Moreover, each of these approaches, rather than articulating a 'rejectionist' policy, corresponds more to an interculturalist statement.



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*Preface: my history as a female Korean choreographer.*

*I started to learn ballet when I was ten years old because my mother believed that it would make me stronger. This remedial stimulus was, however, replaced two years later after I saw a performance by Jeong-hee Hong's ballet company. I was hooked. From then on, schoolwork started to take second place to my overriding ambition to become a ballerina. This single-minded determination gained me a place at Ewha Women's University in 1978 as a dance student.*

*University life opened my eyes to the serious problems in South Korea and this, in turn, had a serious impact on my studies. The authoritarian government had overseen the death and imprisonment of many Korean people. It also led to the creation of an 'underground' counter culture that had its basis in many of the universities in Korea. It was in one of these resistance groups based at Ewha University that I, along with many of my colleagues, refined my own political beliefs*

*In 1979 the dictator, Chung-hee Park was assassinated by one of his own henchmen. This provided a golden opportunity to form a democratic society. General Chun, however, took political power through a coup d'état in 1980. He also put 2,000 people to death in the city of Kwangju who had demonstrated against his taking office. This massacre remains one of the most significant and emotive events in recent South Korean history.*

*During the 1980s I organised a university demonstration as part of a nation-wide call for an inquiry into the Kwangju massacre. As a result I spent eight months in prison*



*and was expelled from Ewha. I was only able to return to study three years later in 1985. At the same time Chun completed his five-year presidency and, as a result of both the massacre and corruption charges, he was imprisoned. Another dictator Tae Woo No (the last) took his place and the underground movement continued.*

*Upon my return to university I saw the possibility of dance having a social role as a part of this 'underground' cultural movement. My belief was that dance could have a significant and active role in the building of a better and more democratic Korean society. To this end, I began to investigate possible links between the politics of resistance and the agit-propaganda elements of Korean mask dance. At the same time I came to realise that my own aspirations as a choreographer with a social conscience would not be fulfilled through ballet. Therefore I learned traditional Korean dance, Salpuri, and monk's dance from the dance master, Mae-bang Lee. Consequently, traditional Korean dance techniques became a new source of inspiration.*

*While working with Lee I still needed to support myself by teaching ballet so I established my own school in 1986, took the RAD (Royal Academy of Dancing) teacher's course and attended ballet classes in London and New York. At the same time, I pursued the other side of my career as a dancer, choreographer and director of two dance companies Bulim and Didim. I also became a member of the Korean National Dance Committee, whose purpose is to find a Korean dance form that could not only contribute to society but also make a stand against Eurocentrism.*

*For most of the 1980s and 90s I lived a double life as both a ballet teacher and also a Korean dancer. Having studied both forms I soon came to the conclusion that, contrary*

*to the opinion held by many dance scholars in Korea, there should be no hierarchy between ballet and traditional Korean dance.*

*The 1990s witnessed a major change in the Korean political situation to a democratic system. As a result, street performances that originally formed part of the underground cultural movement came to an end. The concern shifted from politics to aesthetics. In 1995 I sold my ballet school and, with the brutal authoritarian regime and the suffering of the Korean people now part of my history, came to England to study.*

*During the 1990s there was no opportunity for advanced dance study in South Korea. I had no choice but to leave. Being away from Korea, however, has had an unexpected effect wherein geographical distance has provided a level of critical detachment. It has also provided me the opportunity to understand dance practice and theory as it exists in, and contributes to, an international scholarship. This, in turn has made more sophisticated my early dichotomous understanding of indigenous and western dance practice and theory. Rather than see these two loci (east and west, indigenous and foreign, traditional and modern) as somehow exclusive, diametrically opposite and therefore incompatible, I now see the need to recognise them as interdependent, fluid and contingent. This revelation forms the basis of my own dance philosophy. It also provokes many questions.*

*Traditional Korean dance dates back over 5,000 years and comes in many styles including 'folk', 'palace', 'monk' or 'shaman' dance: each one articulating a different facet of Korean culture. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, and in the face of rapid technological, cultural and political development, how should these ancient*



*practices be treated? Do they still have value or function? Should they remain as 'museum pieces' or can some forms be developed? If so, which ones, and how?*

*Like many other countries that have experienced colonialism, Korea has witnessed the erasure of a great deal of its pre-colonial history. Of what remains, what has or has not been 'tainted' by colonialism is impossible to know for certain. For example, to what extent has traditional Korean been affected or changed by colonialism? In other words, what constitutes 'original' Korean dance? Is there, or has there ever been, such a thing? Without this information, how is it possible to investigate 'traditional characteristics'? One of the central tenets of traditional dance that remains virtually unaffected is its 'spiritual' dimension. With its roots firmly in the notion of ritual, much traditional Korean dance is concerned with healing. It is this 'remedial' notion that I have adopted into my own dance practice wherein, through using my own 'weak' body in performance, I can not only improve my own health but, through transference of energy, 'heal' others. My link with tradition is, however, not only conceptual, but also physical wherein my own belief in the curative properties of dance remind me of a specific traditional Korean dance narrative.*

*'Nagani' is a Korean word that has two meanings, either a disabled or a foolish person. Nagani ch'um (or Nagani-dance) is a traditional Korean dance that tells of slaves who are killed by a nobleman's intermediary. Their dead bodies are then left out onto a mountain with only a straw mat. The spirits of these slaves, because they are so filled with anger and grief, cannot leave this world. Instead, they come back to life and struggle to make the world a better place where slaves are free. The main part of the dance depicts this return to life wherein, due to the many wounds the initial movements*

*of the dancers are very small and suggest the intense struggle against immobility.*

*Nagani ch'um is one of the main versions of folly dance. Hee-wan Chae (1985: 41) points out that folly dance is not actually danced by a disabled person but 'a dance of struggle by a normal person; it develops from a disabled society to normal society'. He goes on to claim that, in Folly dance, it is society that is somehow disabled and the performance is meant to have curative properties.*

*My philosophy of dance having healing properties also stems from Korean shaman dance. The essence of shamanism lies in the practice of 'kut' (which translates as 'ritual'). In shaman rituals, the shaman fights with the ghosts of disease, famine or drought according to the needs of the village. Not only does the shaman do battle with natural disasters but may also be required to fend off invading forces. Other areas of concern addressed by shaman in their rituals and that have a direct impact on agricultural society include good weather and a large catch for fishermen, curing diseases, invoking rain or asking for a bumper harvest.*

*It is this concept of dance having a remedial effect that remains my greatest concern. For me, dancing is not merely an exercise in aesthetics but also has an active social function. Having trained as a dancer due to early fears about my own physical weakness, the notion of dance having both sharing and healing properties has always taken priority. Ancient east Asian philosophy would describe this concept as 'chi' – a means of transferring natural energy from one person to another. In my own performance, 'chi' circulates between dancer and audience and from stronger to weaker member. In western theatre dance the emphasis has nearly always been on the pursuit of*

*excellence, either in terms of technical ability or interpretation. This, in turn, promotes a hierarchy wherein the weak must give way to the strong. This is not an ideology shared by traditional Korean dance where aesthetics and technique take second place to more 'spiritual' and communitarian concerns.*

*My starting point in creating new dance works is not only inspired by shaman and folly dance but also takes a cue from more intercultural concerns. Consequently, certain different forms of contemporary western practice including contact improvisation and those developed by Rosemary Butcher and Carol Brown influence my choreographic style. For example, my understanding of contact improvisation is that it is a method of sharing as well as a technique. Moreover, the reliance on physical intimacy and trust in contact improvisation provokes a different atmosphere than that produced by Korean shaman dance where physical contact is almost unheard of.*

*Exploring both the differences and similarities between eastern traditional and western contemporary dance are the foundation of my own intercultural approach to choreography.*

**Part One.**

**HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF KOREAN DANCE.**

## **Chapter One.**

### **A discourse on Eurocentrism and Korean dance.**



### 1.1. Study context and research parameters.

The colonial experience of Japanese Imperialism (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953) resulted in the partition of the Korean peninsula into a communist North and a capitalist South. Following this division, South Korea was governed by a series of authoritarian governments, from that of President Syngman Rhee (1946-1960) to that of Roh Tae-woo (1987-1992).<sup>1</sup> As a result of over forty years of intense political struggle South Korea eventually became a democratic society at the beginning of the 1990s with Kim Young-sam as the new President (1993 – 1997). Two further democratic presidencies followed; Kim Dae-jung (1998 – 2002) and No Mu-hyeon (2003 - ). One of the main issues facing all three of these presidencies has been the difficulties surrounding re-unification of North and South Korea to which end both Kim Dae-jung and his successor have attempted to retain lines of dialogue. The main cause for the lack of significant progress, however, is an extreme right wing tendency within Southern political circles to see re-unification only in terms of a North Korean abandonment of its Communist ideology in favour of a South Korean form of capitalism.

South Korea remains one of the wealthiest countries in the world,<sup>2</sup> having quickly recovered from both the Korean War and then the East Asian financial crisis of 1997.<sup>3</sup> While South Korea has achieved great economic power through modernisation this has also led to heightened levels of discrimination between rich and poor, the educated and the uneducated, and the urban populace and outlying rural communities. Moreover, the development of

industry brought with it gruelling labour conditions, environmental problems and an over-concentration of population in the capital Seoul. As a result, South Korean culture has become Janus-faced, wherein major economic development on the one hand is contrasted with the creation of a powerless economic and social underclass.

The huge change brought about by fifty years of modernisation in South Korea has impacted not only upon the political and economic landscape but also upon its cultural life. In the performing arts, this development has led to the creation of Korean New Dance, (*Shinmuyong*).<sup>4</sup> The end of the colonial period also saw an increase in the number of institutes of dance education that, in turn, contributed to the formation of a new generation of practitioners, audiences and performance venues.<sup>5</sup> Due to the influence of both Korean New Dance and a renewed emphasis on dance within higher education, the social and financial status of dancers has improved. For example, the dance historian Wha-Jin Oh (1992) remarks that Korean New Dance practitioners Seung-hee Chio and Taek-won Cho are not only highly educated but also come from a high-class background.

Despite these improvements, this process of modernisation is not without its critics who argue that, due to a preference for Western dance techniques, Korean dance is losing its indigenous character. The dance critics Sun-yeol Lee, Jong-ho Lee and Ki-suk Seong go as far as denouncing much late-twentieth century Korean performance as little more than 'slave' or 'rubbish' dance (Lee. S, December 1999: 8).



Elsewhere, a shift towards a 'Eurocentric' policy within both the form and subject matter of Korean dance has led to widespread debate about the relative value of 'tradition' within contemporary dance practice. This concern with Eurocentrism is, however, not unique to the contemporary Korean dance field but is also common to many other areas of Korean cultural practice. Organisations such as the National Writers Association, the National Art Association, the National Music Association, National Film Association and the National Dance Association have all, in recent years, made their own contributions to this ongoing debate.<sup>6</sup>

Although Korean National Dance has been a cultural movement since the early 1980s, its concerns with a Eurocentric 'take-over' have yet to make any significant impact on Korean dance scholarship. This is because, as with western culture, critical discourse on dance in South Korea still lags behind that devoted to the other arts.

To date, only a small number of publications directly address the problems surrounding Eurocentric tendencies in Korean dance. One of these, *Kondongche ui Ch'um, Sinmyeong ui Ch'um* (*Communitarian Dance and Joyful Dance*, 1985) by Hee-wan Chae is a collection of essays previously published in a number of Korean journals and newspapers.<sup>7</sup> Another by Chae, *Hanguk Ch'um ui Jeongsineun Mueosinga* (*What is the philosophy of Korean dance?*, 2000) consists of a number of interviews conducted with artists who, although not from a dance background, are concerned with its philosophical and aesthetic principles. Yet another, *Ch'um gwa Sam ui Munwha* (*The Culture of Dance and Life*, 1989), by Chae-hyeon Kim,

discusses the indigenous elements of Korean dance.<sup>8</sup> This text has two parts: academic writing on the definition of Korean dance, followed by a collection of his previously published reviews of Korean choreographers' works. Although the term 'Eurocentrism' is not used in any of these three texts, the concern is with western influences upon Korean dance in relation to the context of the culture as a whole.

Elsewhere, this concern with dance's place within Korean society has led to a gradual shift in policy concerning its practice in the latter part of the twentieth century. For example, during the 1980s, the driving force behind the National Dance movement was with the eradication of colonial influences and the growth of a national democracy. By the 1990s, however, the concern shifted away from these broad cultural matters and towards the narrower remit of the development of Korean dance practice and aesthetics. As a result, a previous desire to challenge Eurocentrism within Korean dance gave way to a more 'open' intercultural dynamic.

This exposition draws upon these theoretical and practical based concerns both with the changing status and Janus-faced nature of Korean dance and also its relationship to notions of Eurocentrism. The central remit will be to problematise a long-standing hierarchical conception of dance wherein western forms are appointed a higher status than Korean ones. Beginning with a detailed examination of the impact of modernisation upon Korean dance and how that has manifested itself in the guise of Eurocentric tendencies, the concern will

then be with how Korean choreographers have, through their practice, attempted to address this shift.

Starting at the beginning of the twentieth century and the Japanese colonial period, this investigation will trace the evolution of different forms of traditional Korean dance up to the present day. Of concern will be how elements derived from various western dance forms, such as Classical ballet and Graham technique, have been introduced and how this has impacted upon the practice of dance in South Korea. This will lead to a detailed discussion of how advocates of Korean National Dance have, since the 1980s, challenged this process of westernisation by re-introducing Korean characteristics into their choreography. The final part of this investigation will turn to late twentieth and early twenty-first century practice and present a close analysis of works by four Korean choreographers, all of whom have sought to address the complex nature of interculturalism as it impacts upon, and continues to influence the development of, contemporary Korean dance.

## 1.2. *Han'guk ch'um* (Korean dance).

According to both Chae-hyeon Kim (1989) and Judy Van Zile (2001), *Han'guk ch'um* is a generic term that encompasses many dance genres in the Korean peninsula. The two distinct social systems and cultures that have come about as a result of partition have, however, so influenced the development of these various forms that, the term *Han'guk ch'um* generally refers only to South Korean genres. More specifically, Van Zile's (2001: 35) categorisation



of Korean dance (adapted from Haeree Choi, 1995) divides Korean Dance into indigenous (*han'guk muyong* – 'in it's narrow meaning') and western forms. Korean forms are then further divided into court, folk and ritual/religious dance while western dance incorporates modern dance and ballet. Van Zile then goes on to add at least four other levels of sub-categorisations. Although for a purely historical or anthropological perspective such detail is useful, it is not needed for this investigation. Rather, and to avoid confusion in this study, the more general term 'Korean dance' will be divided into five sub-categories namely: traditional Korean Dance (*chŏnt'ong muyong*), New dance (*shinmuyong*), Creative dance (*ch'angjak muyong*), modern dance (*hyondae muyong*) and ballet.

Traditional Korean dance, as has been explained, will refer to indigenous court, folk and ritual/religious forms.<sup>9</sup> The term 'New Dance' (*shinmuyong*) refers to the style first devised by the practitioner Seung-hee Choi during the Japanese colonial period by modifying both Japanese New Dance (which was inspired by German *Neue Tanz*) and traditional Korean dance.<sup>10</sup> Creative dance (*ch'angjak muyong*), as Van Zile (2001: 18) explains, 'refers to a type of dance in which individual movements relate to traditional dance, but themes and choreographic structure are new.' Modern dance will refer to the form that is heavily influenced by Graham technique while ballet is self-explanatory.

### 1.3. Eurocentrism in relation to contemporary choreography in South Korea.

#### 1.3.1. Discourse on Eurocentrism.

The consensus of opinion amongst post-colonial theorists such as Edward Said (1978), Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994), Enrique Dussel (1995), and Brian Crow and Chris Banfield (1996) is that Eurocentrism refers to both the process of European colonial occupation and the ideological apparatus used as its justification. Moreover, Said sees Eurocentrism as a 'poison' and describes how so-called 'third world' native intellectuals have become 'stained with Eurocentrism in the process of assimilating Western culture and knowledge' (1978: 168). As a result, Said adds, these intellectuals have come to believe that Western culture is superior to their own and are highly critical of de-colonial practices that inspire independent consciousness. This condescending ideology, Said later contends, stems from a western view of Asia and Africa as 'static, despotic, and irrelevant to world history.' Elsewhere, Crow and Banfield (1996) point out that the impact of this sense of 'irrelevance' has been the disruption and demission of the Third World people's experience of life, art and culture. This erosion of indigenous values is seen by Alan Powell and Melbourne Frankenstein (1997: 10) the most significant outcome of an ideological belief that,

Europe (and 'Europeanised' areas like the U.S.A.) is always a superior Centre from which knowledge, creativity, technology, culture, and so forth flow to the inferior Periphery, the so-called underdeveloped, ignorant, uncreative countries.

This ideology, Powell and Frankenstein go on to argue, 'justifies imperial invasion as enlightenment.'

Although Korea has never experienced European colonial rule, Eurocentrism has had a profound effect upon the attitudes and values of South Korean dance professionals. This is because, as the literary critic Nak-cheong Paek (1999: 10) points out, Eurocentrism pervaded Korea in the process of colonisation by Japan, which itself has developed according to a Western model of modernisation. Moreover, according to Paek, upon liberation from the colonial rule from Japan, this process of Eurocentrism has given way to Americanisation; an ideology that promotes the superiority of American life over other cultures including European ones. To that extent, Americanism is merely an extension of 'Eurocentrism'. Furthermore, Eurocentrism is a cultural rather than geographical phenomenon, as Paek (p.15) explains,

Eurocentrism is an attitude that gives more value to Western and North American than actually they have. That is the reason why Eurocentrism plays a main role in coloniality. Eurocentrism is deeply involved in a main decision what is true or not and what is beautiful or not. Eurocentrism participates at the deep area which decides the 'true', 'beauty' and even what is knowledge or not.

(translation)

According to Paek (p.11), the Japanese colonisation of Korea was achieved through the emulation of the imperialistic tenets of modern occidental ideology, under whose rubric East Asian countries could be essentialised as backward 'others.' To this end, and in order to re-orient the national consciousness of the Korean people, Japan was able to introduce 'new' Western cultural practices to the upper classes, while, at the same time, suppress aspects of indigenous folk-culture, such as mask dance and shaman dance. For example, during its colonial rule, the Japanese government closed all shaman temples (*sadang*) in Korea.

The impact of colonialism is, according to Crow and Banfield (1996: 15), still tangible in the third world. They remark that,

..... in the period of neo-colonialism since independence control has typically been exercised indirectly, by means variously of unequal trade relations, indebtedness, and the threat (and sometimes the reality) of military or economic force.

Because of this, and as Immanuel Wallerstein (1996) points out, Eurocentrism remains a dominant ideological force in South Korea that impacts upon all areas of sociocultural development including systems of education, intellectual development and arts practices. Elsewhere, post-colonial theorists such as Jack Woddis (1967), Kwame Nkrumah (1974), Bill Ashcroft *et al* (1989) and Philip Altbach (1995) all explain this indirect form of domination by the West over developing countries as 'cultural neo-colonialism' This



indirect, yet ongoing, influence of Eurocentric ideology, upon South Korean cultural development is, according to Enrique Dussel and Paek, the 'underside' of modernisation.

### 1.3.2. Eurocentrism; the 'underside' of modernisation.

Dussel's (1993: 66) proposition that modernisation has two sides may be useful. He traces the inception of 'modernity' as far back as the 1492 European invasion of America; an act justified by the belief that Europe was the centre of civilisation and all non-European cultures were the peripheral 'others' that needed to be cultivated. He thus argues that the underside of modernity's claims for emancipation, reason and freedom involves the colonial justification of genocidal violence and exploitation. Today, the legacy of this centralist policy can still be recognised in structures that uphold class-inequality, sexual discrimination and racism. According to Dussel (1995), this 'underside' of the modern project can only be overcome with the eradication of the last vestiges of colonialist power.

Today, according to Dussel (1993: 76), the project of modernity remains 'incomplete'.<sup>11</sup>

Elsewhere, Paek (1999: 13) suggests that, in its place, a process of 'transcendence' through which 'both modernity and its converse co-realise themselves in a process of mutual creative fertilisation' should be pursued. He goes on to explain this 'trans-modernity' as, 'the co-realisation of an incorporative solidarity between centre/periphery, man/woman, different races, different ethnic groups, different classes, civilisation/nature, Western culture/ Third World culture, etc.'

For this 'co-realisation' to happen, Dussel (1993: 76) argues,

the negated and victimised 'other-face' of modernity must, in the first place, discover itself as innocent, as the innocent victim of a ritual sacrifice. In other words, the existence of the peripheries, which has been lost by Eurocentrism, must be restored to 'World History'.

Dussel believes that the main cause of problems in modern society such as 'racism, environmental problems, class and imperial power' (p.63) remain as the 'underside' of modernity. He also criticises the belief that a 'superior' Europe has the 'absolute right' to continue a programme of 'civilisation' that it initiated during the Middle Ages.

According to Paek (1978: 190) this 'underside' to modernity is reflected in a common attitude wherein 'Western culture is mature and superior, while Korean culture transmitted from tradition is immature and inferior'. He goes on to criticise Korean scholars who try to explain Korean society through the application of Western theoretical models.

Following a similar train of thought, Powell and Frankenstein (1997) argue that children in non-Western countries should be allowed to study mathematics in ways that are in keeping with their own culture. To this end, for example, their interest is not just with the geometry of Angolan sand drawings, but also 'in the politics of imperialism that arrested the development of this cultural tradition and in the politics of cultural imperialism that discounts [such]

mathematical activity' (p.2). This Eurocentric perspective has particular resonance in the Korean dance field.

### 1.3.3. Eurocentrism in relation to contemporary choreography in Korea.

In contemporary Korea, the impact of modernity has resulted not only in an increase in the number of dance practitioners, the inclusion of dance as a subject at universities and the building of theatres designed for dance performance, but has also introduced a strong Eurocentric tendency. In other words, the underside of modern artistic and technical development is a distinct colonial ideology. For example, and according to Hae-jin Jeong (2001), upper-class people want their children to learn ballet rather than traditional Korean dance or Korean Creative dance.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Jeong adds, the parents of ballet students are more often from the upper classes than those whose major is in traditional Korean dance or Korean Creative dance. Furthermore, professional practitioners see more artistic merit in adopting Western dance forms, the consequence of which has led to the increased popularity of these forms throughout South Korea.

One of the earliest of these Western forms, German *Neue Tanz*, was formally introduced to Korean intellectuals in 1926 by the Japanese choreographer Ish Baku, (I-hyang Kang, 1989: 38). This Japanese 'take' on *Neue Tanz* was later modified by the Korean dancer Seung-hee Choi, under the generic heading of Korean New Dance (*Shinmuyong*).<sup>13</sup> The impact of this new form led not only to her widespread popularity in Korea and Japan but also to

*Shinmuyong* occupying the centre of Korean dance society for the next thirty years (Kang, 1989). The dance critic Hee-wan Chae (1985: 25) argues, however, that similar to intellectuals who were influenced by Eurocentric ideology, Choi's practice was to ignore the national realities underlying Japanese colonialism. Moreover, according to the journalist I-hyang Kang (1989), by performing for Japanese soldiers during their 1930s conflict with China, Choi used dance as an Imperialist propaganda exercise.

After Korea's liberation from Japanese imperialism, other Western forms such as ballet and Graham modern dance joined *Shinmuyong* to become the three main genres of dance in South Korea. As a consequence, traditional Korean dance was pushed further towards the periphery. Fearing the loss of an important part of Korean heritage, the National Dance movement was created during the 1980s. The founding principle was the creation of dance forms sympathetic to Korean culture replete with Korean body imagery and movement vocabulary. As such, National Dance can be defined as a post-colonial remedial practice that seeks to overcome Eurocentrism in South Korean dance.

It has already been argued that contemporary South Korean dance is based upon, and judged according to, Western aesthetic values introduced during the Japanese colonial period. As such, how this modernising practice continues to influence the post-colonial development of Korean Creative Dance, ballet and *hyondae muyong* (modern dance) is an important consideration.



It is impossible to ignore the Imperialist legacy on both the theory and practice of contemporary Korean dance. Because Japanese *Neue Tanz* introduced the concept of the dance professional to Korea during the 1920s, and in so doing reversed dance's low art status, this period is widely regarded as the start of the modern period in Korean dance.<sup>14</sup> The dance scholar Byeong-ho Chung (1993: 159) contends that, although Korean New Dance was based on Western forms, the practitioners created their own style that was distinct from both Japanese and German *Neue Tanz*. In this respect Korean New Dance can be understood as a hybrid form with colonial roots.

Other Korean dance critics do not share Chung's positive evaluation of Korean New Dance. Rather, they argue, it is merely a distortion of the indigenous characteristics of traditional Korean dance.<sup>15</sup> For example, Seolya Han's overview of Seung-hee Choi's dance work during the 1930s focuses upon its inaccurate portrayal of Korean sensitivity and ridiculing of Korean ancestral heritage (in Son-uk Park, 1998: 23). Han contrasts this new theatre-based work with traditional Korean folk dance that, he claims, is more sensitive to the everyday life of Korean audience members. This folk dance was also 'closer' to the people in other ways: anyone could perform these dances, there was little physical distance between the audience and the dancers, and the dances were performed for free outside in marketplaces and village squares.

The advocates of New Dance tried to create an original dance style that borrowed from these Korean folk dance values. While stylistic attributes were retained, however, the thematic

concern was very different. The practitioners of New Dance were not concerned with contemporaneous socio-political matters arising from the colonial situation. Unlike traditional folk dance's macro-concern with expressing a communal sense of grief about the Japanese occupation, New Dance was more focused on the micro-policies of individual aesthetic development.

The second genre at the centre of Korean cultural practice, ballet, achieved prominence in South Korea during the 1960s shortly after Jeong-hee Hong started teaching at the Department of Dance at Ewha Women's University. Its popularity, both as career choice and high-art diversion, continued to increase throughout the 1970s and 80s. For example, the head of dance department of Yewon Arts School, Hae-jin Jeong, remarked that, presently there are more students of ballet than there are of Korean Dance.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the acceptance level required for prospective ballet students is considerably higher than that for Korean counterparts.<sup>17</sup>

There are about fifteen professional Ballet Companies presently performing in South Korea, including the 'National Ballet Company', 'Universal Ballet Company', 'Kwangju City Ballet Company' and 'Seoul Ballet Theatre'. There are also several small-scale independent companies such as 'Ballet Blanc' and 'Josungmi Ballet Company' that mainly comprise of post-graduate students from specific universities.

The choreographer Wan-sun Yuk introduced the third genre, *hyondae muyong* (modern dance) to South Korea during the 1960s after a two-year period of study at the Martha Graham School in the USA. Like Jeong-hee Hong, Yuk became a professor at the Department of Dance of Ewha Women's University where she taught modern dance for about twenty years. She later founded the Association of Modern Dance, and is currently president of the Modern Dance Promotion of Korea. Her Graham-inspired influence on modern dance in South Korea was so profound that, throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, the Graham style was synonymous with modern dance. Only recently have Korean critics started to draw attention to other forms of modern dance. As with ballet, the number of *hyondae muyong* (modern dance) practitioners and enthusiasts has continued to increase.

By the end of the twentieth century the three main genres of South Korean dance were established within the higher education system and boundaries between them were formalised. How this process of institutionalisation has further promoted the dominance of Western dance forms in South Korea will be examined next.

Since the Department of Dance was established at the Ewha Women's University in 1963, other University dance departments have admitted dance students according to the three genres: *han'guk muyong* (Korean Dance), *hyondae muyong* (modern dance) and ballet. Moreover, universities remain the most dominant recruitment-pool for dance professionals in South Korea.<sup>18</sup> The formal trisection of dance departments, therefore, means that at least two thirds of dance students and professionals are involved in either ballet or Western modern



dance. In addition, given that dance students who choose their major in Korean Dance have to take a test of practical skills in either modern dance or ballet, it is evident that Western dance is now the 'common language' of the dance field. Consequently, while the number of performances of Korean Creative dance, modern dance and ballet have continued to grow, performances of traditional Korean dance have dwindled.<sup>19</sup>

Traditional Korean dance continues to suffer as a poor cousin to western dance forms. Furthermore, the emphasis placed upon western dance techniques within the higher education system indirectly reinforces Western aesthetic standards. Such is the extent of this ideology that a major requirement of Korean dancers is how closely they physically resemble their western counterparts: possessing long-limbs and a small face for example. At the same time within the higher education system there is a widespread failure to recognise non-Western indigenous aesthetic values.

As suggested by this argument the central concern of this investigation is not with Western dance forms *per se* but the ways in which they are awarded status. In other words, key to this analysis is the wholesale adoption of a hierarchic approach to dance genres according to modernist Western aesthetic codes; a phenomenon of Eurocentrism.

Dance critic Chae-hyeon Kim (1989) points out that one of the main concerns amongst dance scholars is how the trisection of the three dance genres has become very rigid. The three categories are now, he claims, officially considered to be mutually exclusive. There are, he

suggests, two reasons for this. First, the founders of South Korean dance, such as Jeong-hee Hong (ballet), Wan-sun Yuk (modern dance) and Mae-ja Kim (Korean Creative dance), not only tended to adhere to their own styles but also rejected any influence from the other dance genres on their work or that of their students. Second, the quasi-feudal nature of the apprenticeship of students to dance professors in universities. This relationship is so restrictive, even after graduation, most young dancers have to belong to a dance group founded by their supervisor or professor. It is difficult for them to undertake independent dance activities and they rarely participate in co-operative works with other groups. Instead, they adhere exclusively to their own dance form. This tendency encourages an insular approach to dance genres amongst South Korean dance professionals that, in turn, has impeded creativity.

According to Hee-wan Chae (1985), another impediment to creative development is the tendency to view 'social issues' as the territory more associated with folk dance. As with the hierarchic structuring of different dance genres and the Western concept of aesthetic value, this can be understood as a further demonstration of the impact of Eurocentrism upon the South Korean dance culture. What is not addressed by Chae, however, is the impact of a modern western model of gender inequality upon post-colonial dance practice in Korea.

#### 1.3.4. Patriarchal ideology and modern South Korean dance.

Women of the Third World have, according to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, borne a 'double burden' by being subjected to a 'double colonisation'.<sup>20</sup> Raman Seldom, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker (1997: 236) explain Spivak's idea as follows,

The theme of women's 'double colonisation' ..... runs through and links various traditions of postcolonial feminist criticism and attempts to develop 'new ethnic' cultural and national identities.

The phenomenon of patriarchy is similar to Eurocentrism in that both propose the view that The Third World and women represent the necessary 'other' within Western white male reasoning. Non-European peoples and women are, according to both ideologies, on the periphery of knowledge, creativity, technology and culture. In the Third World, all aspects of women's life, history and creativity are subject to, and controlled by, an institutionalised Patriarchal Law.

Western feminist writers have written much on dance and how it both reflects and comments upon institutionalised gender inequality and the imbalance of power. This relationship between practice and its ideological underpinnings is particularly pronounced in discussions on ballet. For example, Melbourne Goldberg (1987), in her examination of the representational politics of the *pas de deux* argues that, as demonstrated by the ways in which the male dancer manipulates his female partner, the ballerina's dancing is crafted in order to



appeal to a 'male gaze'. Elsewhere, Ann Daly (1987) contends that the female dancer has long been regarded as the object of male desire. Furthermore, Judith Lynne Hanna (1988) observes that the ways in which women are represented in ballet continues to be regulated by male choreographers, supported by male partners and aimed towards the edification of male audiences.

These patriarchal tendencies are also apparent in the power relationships articulated in modern Korean choreography. Masculinist as well as Eurocentric values dominate Korean dance practice and its theory. As in western dance, the ideal spectator is believed to be male, a concept to which all aspects of female representation are subject. Moreover, while women predominate in both the practical and theoretical arena, men run most of the institutions that support and fund dance in Korea. For example, of the twelve members of the Dance Critics Society in South Korea, only two are women. Furthermore, although male dancers and choreographers remain in the minority, as a percentage, they still tend to achieve a greater level of success than their female counterparts.

The ahistorical approach and unquestioning dualistic rhetoric of feminist scholarship on dance has, in recent years, been criticised by Western post-feminists such as Sally Banes (1998) and Alexandra Carter (1999). Banes, for example, points to what she sees as three problematic areas in previous feminist analyses of ballet. First, a failure to acknowledge the socio-historical context of the fairy or folk-tale narrative structure. Second, a politically

inspired stress on reading female representations according to positive or negative models.

Third, an unquestioning adoption of the psychoanalytic model of 'the male gaze'.

As an antidote, Banes' method focuses on the dance as 'text', a materialist approach which, she claims, not only considers the socio-historical context but also avoids essentialist rhetoric. She states that, according to this strategy which 'looks closely at the evidence of the works themselves, one actually finds a much more complex range of representations than has previously been suggested' (p.3).

Elsewhere, and following a similar remit to Banes, Carter (1999: 92) argues that 'Ballet becomes immobilized by [feminist] discourse, trapped as a product of patriarchy.' In contrast she identifies three key characteristics of postfeminist writings on dance:

Firstly, a critique of the gaze as a theoretical framework, particularly in relation to dance; secondly, a redirected emphasis from 'readings' of dance which focus on symbolisation and representation to those which address its poetic and kinaesthetic function, and lastly, the reinstatement of a historical perspective in what has become a profoundly ahistorical endeavour.

Carter also argues that feminist writers have focused too much on ballet as an essentialist and 'bodiless' metaphysics of culture and, in so doing, have ignored the agency of the ballerina to articulate complex, and sometimes contradictory, meaning. As an antidote to previous methodologies that have 'negate[d] the richness of the ballet heritage and the diversity of its



incumbents' (Carter, 1999: 92), both Banes and Carter advocate an investment in more detailed examinations of specific ballet works and a rejection of what Banes (1998: 5) describes as a redundant 'reflectionist view of art and culture'.

Such postfeminist concerns have yet to have an impact on Korean dance scholarship. Moreover, in contrast to western dance practice, Korean ballet has yet to articulate representations of women that problematise old-fashioned patriarchal models. This stagnant situation is the result of a widely accepted traditionalist attitude to women in Korean culture. For example, according to the convention of *samjongjido*, women must obey their fathers until they are married, then obey their husbands and then, after the husband has died, obey the son. Furthermore, and as described within the concept of *chilgeojiyak*, any husband can banish his wife if she exhibits any of the seven bad behaviours: if she is impolite to her parents-in-law, cannot bear a son, behaves in a lewd manner, is jealous of other wives, has serious diseases, swears or is a kleptomaniac.

Korean society, however, has developed rapidly during the last two decades of the twentieth century and, today, Korean women are trying to deconstruct old-fashioned patriarchal values. There are many feminist organisations in South Korea including The Korea Women's Associations United (KWAU), which, since its creation in 1987, has become one of the most powerful feminist organisations in South Korea.<sup>21</sup> Since its founding, many women have gained self-awareness and a better social position by following two related courses of action. In the 1980s, the focus was on the women's role in the resistance movement against the

authoritarian government and the effort to build a democratic society. The 1990s, however, saw a shift in policy as women started to engage in various gender discourses and a number of feminist manifestos were published. One of these, the Feminist Artist Network (FAN) was more progressive than the KWAU's.<sup>22</sup> The FAN continues to lead debates on feminist issues such as sexuality, bisexuality and transgender representation in the arts. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, and by drawing reference from similar ongoing debates in the West, Korean feminists have broadened their remit to include all aspects of the identity politics of Korean cultural practice.

Many of the key precepts advocated in this recent feminist discourse will be considered in Part Two of this thesis where three Korean dance works will be analysed: *Kkocksin* (1999) by Sang-gun Han, *Salpuri 9* (1992) by Jung-hee Lee and *Pallae* (1993) by Jeong-ho Nam. Following on from this investigation, Part Three will then be devoted to a detailed exploration of this writer's own choreographic work.

#### 1.4. Two strategies for overcoming Eurocentrism.

In this thesis, the process of overcoming Eurocentrism has both a national and global dimension. First, a repositioning of Korean culture and dance that has historically been neglected as a result of modernisation. Second, a programme of 'de-centring': a deconstruction of redundant hierarchical and dualistic structures that support notions of 'otherness' in relation to non-Western 'norms'. It is important to stress, however, that this

deconstructionist strategy does not automatically signal a return to an idealised model of 'pre-modern' Korean cultural practice, nor does it suggest any notion of 'Korea-centrism' or ultra-nationalism.

#### 1.4.1. Evolution of tradition.

In respect to the 'national' dimension, Dussel (1995) argues that, due to the process of Eurocentrism, indigenous and traditional practices have been shifted to the periphery of culture in the Third World. He adds that this process has led to the erosion of National identity. Subsequently, his aim is to restore the periphery that has been slighted due to colonial or neo-colonial influence and, through this process, revitalise what he considers to be a weakened sense of identity. This emphasis upon notions of 'tradition' does not, however, translate as a regressive move towards a more conservative ideology because, and according to Frantz Fanon (1967), retaining traditional values has always been associated with the ongoing struggle against colonial power. In other words, the restoration of traditional culture does not mean a renewed investment in a 'romantic idealisation' of the past.

To this end, Fanon points out that 'the writer's preoccupation with the past must be with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope' (p.166).

Moreover, he adds that, 'the responsibility of the writer is not to immerse the people in a past time but to join and inspire them to confront the present life as a historical moment'.



Elsewhere, Chae (1985: 22) develops this argument when he defines tradition as both a 'stored body' made up from the accumulation of historical realities, and also a 'potential body of social progress' that is always open to creative practices. Following its own version of this 'open' policy, Korean National Dance has tended to concentrate upon the progressive and creative folk dance form rather than the conservative practices of court (palace) dance.

Accordingly, it is within the folk dance arena that an 'evolution of traditional dance to the present' as a main strategy for abrogating Eurocentrism in Korean culture can be imagined. In Chae's (1985: 126) words,

The evolution of traditional dance in the present is to enable a new mode of expression that communicates people's lives now through drawing on the social functions and expressive sources which traditional dance used in the past.

(translation)

In premodern (feudal) Korean culture, traditional forms such as mask, shaman and monk dance represented both the bitterness and delight of people's lives. Moreover, shaman dance was widely regarded as having healing properties. Their direct political agenda was both to inspire and encourage anti-establishment thinking amongst the masses.



Yeol-kyu Kim (1981), a scholar who specialises in mask drama, points out that, in almost all traditional Korean performances, tragic and emancipated moods exist together.<sup>23</sup> Chae (1985: 40) develops Kim's observation to point out that,

In a performance, audiences are immersed in pain and frustration that have been weighing on people. Soon afterwards, however, the painful and frustrated mood is diverted to a cheerful and emancipated one. The more pain and frustration are deepened, the more delight and emancipation are heightened. There is a climax of artistic impulse in the turning point between tragedy and emancipation.

(translation)

This pattern of 'tragedy' and 'emancipation' is an expressive source common to all traditional Korean folk dance performances. Moreover, it is one of the main characteristic differences between Korean and Western dance forms. Three other elements unique to Korean folk dance are Communitarianism, Magical realism and *he-bang*.

Communitarianism refers to the intersocial aspect of folk dance wherein people take care of others rather than just themselves. This does not mean, however, that individuality is surrendered to the group dynamic but, rather, identity is articulated as being constructed within a social network. As Chae (1985) suggests, Communitarianism encourages a variety of viewpoints rather than a unilateral ideology. According to the notion of Magical realism, dance does not simply describe realistic circumstance, but also has magical properties wherein the audience is introduced to 'imaginary' worlds. In mask and shaman dance

performance, for example, practitioners are believed to be the embodiment of their dead ancestors and, as such, forge a conduit between the here-and-now and the world beyond. *He-bang* is the concept of emancipation from the legacy of oppression from both colonial power and authoritarian government. In modern Korean dance this notion of *he-bang* has developed to embrace many different anti-establishment sensibilities and new social movements. Gender and sexual equality, concerns with the environment and an anti-war *raison d'être* have, as part of the progressive nature of Korean folk dance, been absorbed into, and hence reshaped the very notion of, this concept of *he-bang*. These concepts of Communitarianism, magical realism and *he-bang* will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two and Three as they constitute part of this investigation into Eurocentrism in contemporary Korean dance practice.

Another key aspect of traditional Korean folk dance is the relationship between movement and 'body image'. According to Chae (1985), in traditional dance, there is a direct correlation between movement and stillness and the dynamic fusion of tragedy and emancipation. In respect to body image, Seok-jae Lim (Chae, 2000: 19) points out that, in folk dance, the emphasis is upon what he describes as 'natural beauty' through the expressive capacity of ordinary people's faces and gestures. This concept can be better understood as it contrasts with the 'ideal' body image associated not only with ballet and modern dance, but also with Korean court dance and Korean New Dance (*Shinmuyong*). Unlike their more stylised and abstract notion of beauty and grace articulated through balance and linearity, the body image in traditional folk dance is fragmented, unbalanced

and curved. As with Communitarianism, Magical realism and *he-bang*, this movement and body image unique to Korean folk dance will be key to the investigation of contemporary Korean dance practice in Part Two and Three.

The evolution of many of the key characteristics of traditional dance to the present day forms one of the main strategies for overcoming Eurocentrism being explored in this exposition. It has already been suggested that, as part of this agenda, what must be considered is how Westernisation (the 'underside of modernity') has led to the peripheralisation of traditional cultural practice. Dussel's (1993) imagined solution to this situation is to abrogate all the effects of Western modernity. Post-colonial scholars such as Nak-cheong Paek (1999) and Gi-uk Han (1999), however, have since questioned this radical approach. For example, Paek argues that overcoming the underside of modernity cannot be achieved without 'adapting to' or 'coping with' its consequences. Likewise, Han's argument can be summarised thus:

Dussel's claim of 'transmodernity' seems to pay less attention to the urgency of 'adapting to' modernity, and more to the importance of interaction between the centre and periphery, even though there is virtue in clarifying the will to overcome Eurocentrism.

This 'interaction' between the centre and the periphery is being pursued not only by practitioners of National Dance but also by other contemporary Korean choreographers who do not wish to discount the experiences and achievements of Western dance. Rather, they only want to recognise that differences between Western and Korean culture and dance exist.



As Chae points out (1985: 164), 'to recognise the differences means to re-position the values and properties of Korean culture [dance] which are covered by Eurocentrism'. This opinion is shared by Kim (1989) who believes that to overcome Eurocentrism, the proponents of National Dance try to create their own practices that have Korean characteristics while retaining an open attitude towards the potential benefits of a dialogical approach towards Western dance practice.<sup>24</sup> To this end, Korean dance practitioners, by incorporating what has been achieved in both the practice and theory of Western dance, can contribute to the development of contemporary dance in Korea.

#### 1.4.2. Postcolonialism and intercultural practice.

The emphasis upon an 'open' attitude towards western cultural practice introduces the second 'deconstructionist' strategy for overcoming Eurocentrism. Starting from a global understanding of the need to shift beyond old fashioned notions of 'traditional' and 'modern' and 'indigenous' and 'foreign', the concern shifts towards how, in contemporary Korean dance, the 'body' can be read as an inscribed metaphor for emancipation from the legacy of colonial rule.

According to post-colonial drama theorists Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins (1996: 2), postcolonialism is not a temporal concept, rather it is 'an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structure and social hierarchies'. The effect of colonisation has an impact upon all parts of social practice such as language, education,



popular culture and the arts. Postcolonialism can then be interpreted as a unifying reactionary response that links performance, literature and the visual arts as expressions of resistance. Rather than being 'fixed', postcolonialism takes on a dynamic quality, a process of creating through the fusion of colonial and indigenous practice.

On this notion of 'fusion' Peter Brook (1993) remarks that post-colonial theatre which incorporates both colonial and indigenous elements is becoming more widespread both in the Third and First World. Moreover, he believes that this process is contributing to the development of theatre practice and its theory. Elsewhere, Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) suggest that the mixing of indigenous and colonial forms in post-colonial environments contributes to the de-centring of Eurocentrism. This hybridity, they add, reinforces the notion that postcolonial processes require continual deconstruction and decentralisation. To this end, they identify four key characteristics to post-colonial performance: acts that respond to the experience of imperialism, whether directly or indirectly; acts performed for the continuation and/or regeneration of the colonized (and sometimes pre-contact) communities; acts performed with the awareness of, and sometimes the incorporation of, post-contact forms, and; acts that interrogate the hegemony that underlies imperial representation. The French dance scholar Patrice Pavis (1996: 8) interprets this post-colonial 'fusion' or 'hybridisation' as 'interculturalism'.<sup>25</sup> This practice, he explains,

.... creates hybrid forms drawing upon a more or less conscious and voluntary mixing of performance traditions traceable to distinct cultural areas. The hybridization is very often such that the original forms can no longer be distinguished.

Following his idea, the mixing of performance conventions with distinct cultures is a postcolonial phenomenon wherein what is 'original' loses importance. Moreover, this notion of 'hybridisation' can be applied to Korean post-colonial dance practice. Dance is not an autonomous entity but exists within, and interacts with, its specific historio-cultural background. As such, the purpose of post-colonial dance practice is not to recover original forms but, rather, to create new practices as an antidote to Eurocentrism. By applying Pavis's ideas to Korean Post-colonial dance practice, it becomes possible to imagine new means of reacting to old-fashioned Imperial attitudes that govern and control articulations of gender, race and class. More specifically, Post-colonial practice can become a forum of resistance against standards imposed by Eurocentric dance works.

Using performance as an antidotal forum is, however, not without problems. As Pavis (1996: 14) points out 'when applied to theatre, the intercultural debate has great difficulty in remaining on the level of "equality" of cultures and exchanges,..'. Finding a practical solution to this difficult situation is, he contends, crucial to the development of a balanced and non-hierarchical Post-colonial relationship between the own and the foreign. Any loss of 'balance' could result in a neo-colonial situation, wherein 'superior' Western forms gradually displace Korea's indigenous cultural practices, or 'intraculturalism', a nationalised 'solipsism'.

The postcolonial theorist Graham Huggan (1998) points out that postcolonial practice refers to the interaction between cultures within a wider intercultural process. His idea can readily be applied to contemporary Korean choreography especially Korean National Dance wherein the impetus is to explore indigenous Korean qualities without recourse to ultraculturalism. Moreover, and by applying Gilbert and Tompkins's theoretic (1996), the dancing body not only comments upon the prevailing socio-historical situation but also contributes to the creation of new meanings and, ultimately, a new society. This aspect of performance goes some way towards explaining why dance has continued to play an important part in the development of new South Korean theatre aesthetics. Over the last two decades of the twentieth century there has been a shift from an appositional and initially liberal protest tradition that highlighted the hardship of the working class, to solidarity and resistance theatre derived from the ideology of Korean consciousness. The current processes of post-colonial practice, however, are performed on a variety of levels. For example, the emergence of new social issues in the 1990s (such as feminism and environmental concerns) can be understood as attempting to make a new space.

Key to Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) investigation is what they describe as the 'metaphorical' impact of colonialism that extends from beyond the physical and the cultural to include people's feelings, emotions and sensitivities. As they also observe, there are many ways though which the body can be read as a metaphor for the need for 'emancipation'. These, they suggest, can include ritual scarification and torture (which is a common mechanism of control in colonial and post-colonial countries). Furthermore, the release from this 'psychic



repression', they contend, can be found in experimental theatre practice. Although Gilbert and Tompkins do not consider dance, this notion of performance as a 'release' can readily be applied to traditional Korean dance. It has already been mentioned that, in both traditional forms and Korean National Dance, 'tragedy' (death) is followed by emancipation (rebirth). As with experimental theatre practice, the body becomes a metaphor, the embodied articulation of the need to overcome the vestigial traces of a pro-western (Eurocentric) postcolonial ideology.

This notion of the performing body as metaphor is addressed by Sally Ann Ness (2000). As part of her investigation into cross-cultural studies of dance she points out how the 'dance', as the evidence that either proves or disproves theories becomes objectified. Amongst the various models of that follow this strategy, the one developed by Judith Lynne Hanna (1979) seems, in its attempt to traverse the broadest spectrum, raises the most concern. As Ness remarks, such a 'universalist' model seeks to 'suppress evidence of cultural difference in favour of producing a discourse of cultural translation' but, in so doing, 'fails to represent adequately the specific practices of [her research object]' (p.250). Herein, as Ness suggests, lies the danger in that, in the pursuit of 'proof', the notion of cultural difference and specificity is virtually ignored. In contrast to the cultural predicaments faced by researchers who are examining cultural that are different to their own, the model presented by Avanthi Meduri (1988), is focused upon herself as the dancing subject. As such Ness continues, 'while the dance object is characterised as existing in foreign culture . . . . it is also situated within a familiar body, a cultural "self".' Therefore, she explains, 'dance is evidence of



cultural difference via its practice, as opposed to its direct and formal observation....' (p.252).

It is this notion of dance as a personally felt experience that, it is argued, needs to remain forefront in this investigation. As this is an examination of dance works by Korean practitioners *including myself*, Meduri's model reads as a potential means of avoiding the tendency to view dance as some 'essential' and 'passive' 'object' that is subject to pre-determined theoretical strategy.

#### 1.5. Structure and aim of this thesis.

The aim of this thesis is the search for a theoretical and practical approach to choreography that can replace Eurocentrism with an interactive intercultural performance dynamic. In order to reach this objective, several key issues need to be addressed. First, an examination of how Eurocentrism, as the 'underside' of modernism, influenced the development of dance in post-colonial Korea. Second, an exploration of the evolution and characteristics of traditional Korean dance. Third, an analysis of the anti-Eurocentric methodologies of the Korean National Dance movement and how they have contributed to the development of traditional Korean dance practice. This historical investigation will then form the background to the analysis of contemporary Korean dance works. Of concern will be to what extent post-colonial dance practice combines elements of both indigenous and Western dance forms in order to address issues such as gender, social inequality and the environment.

This thesis is in three parts. Part One Chapter One has provided a historical framework that traces both the development of Eurocentrism (the 'underside' of modernity) in South Korea and how it has been addressed in post-colonial literature. Moreover, of concern was how this post-colonial situation has impacted upon Korean dance practice, giving rise to the Korean National Dance movement and its promotion of interculturalism: a 'dialogical' strategy that seeks to combine indigenous and western elements.

Based on this notion of 'interculturalism', the second chapter will begin with an exploration of some of the key characteristics of traditional Korean dance. Focusing on 'shaman' dance, the concern will be to what extent Eurocentrism has impacted upon indigenous values and led to the development of contemporary Korean dance practice. The third chapter in Part One will explore, in greater detail, the emergence and subsequent rise of National Dance during the 1980s and 90s. Its anti-Eurocentric policy will be examined as it has been articulated through its working methodology and literary output.

The three chapters that make up Part Two will consist of close analyses of three key contemporary Korean dance works. Chapter Four will present an analysis of *Kkocksin* (1999), a Korean Creative work by Sang-gun Han, as an example of how intercultural choreographic practice can be used to articulate feminist concerns. *Salpuri 9* (1992) by Jung-hee Lee will be examined in Chapter Five, a modern work that combines Korean and Western dance elements in order to address the post-colonial division of the Korean peninsula. Jeong-ho Nam's *Pallae* (1993), although categorised as a modern work, is

stylistically very different to Lee's *Salpuri* 9. Like Han's *Kkocksin*, *Pallae* fuses aspects of Korean folk and Western modern dance to deal with feminist issues. The overall concern of Part Two will be, therefore, how these contemporary Korean dance works, by fusing both Korean and Western characteristics, can be read as the need to overcome the didactic ideology of Eurocentrism and explore a more dialogical interculturalism.

Based on the findings in Part Two, the third part of this thesis will present an analysis of several of this researcher's own dance works. In Chapter Seven, the works discussed will be those created in Korea during the 1980s and 90s. Chapter Eight will then be an examination of two later works, *Movement Experience* (1999) and *O* (2000), both of which were choreographed while living in Britain. Central to this final part of the thesis will be to what extent an intercultural approach to creating dance has been affected through this shift from East to West.

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<sup>1</sup> Korean names, in Korea, are usually family name followed by first name. In this thesis, however, Korean names (like western names) are cited according to a western practice. The only exception to this practice is in respect to Korean presidents Park Chung-hee, Chun Doo-hwan, Roh Tae-woo, Kim Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung and No Mu-hyeon as this is the manner in which they are recognised.

<sup>2</sup> Arnd Wesemann, *Ballet International* (10/2000: 10).

<sup>3</sup> According to the National Statistical Office, 2001, ([www.nso.go.kr/cgi-bin/sws\\_999.cgi](http://www.nso.go.kr/cgi-bin/sws_999.cgi)), the Per capital GNI (Gross National Income) increased from \$249 in 1970 to \$9,628 in 2000, with a 13.1% average increase rate during the three decades.

<sup>4</sup> See 3.1.

<sup>5</sup> According to the *Culture and Arts Statistics In Korea* (1998), 49 universities and eight colleges have a department of dance studies, and there are more than 5,000 students of dance studies every year. There were 1,278 dance performances in South Korea in 1995, including 198 overseas dance performances by South Korean companies.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Nak-cheong Paek has written several books about Korean national literature, such as *National Literature and World Literature I* and *National Literature and World Literature II*. His assertion is that a 'national' literature is one that gives priority to all aspects of Korean socio-cultural activity.

<sup>7</sup> Chae is a very important person in the dance field, as well as a leader of the counter culture movement in South Korea. His academic background is in aesthetics, which he studied at Seoul National University. He organised a mask dance group at that university, and this mask dance group has spread to almost all universities in South Korea. He also dances *Yang-Ju* mask dance combine theory and practice. He is a dance critic and a professor in dance studies in Pusan University (the second capital city in South Korea).

<sup>8</sup> Kim is a dance critic and a professor of the School of Dance at the Korea National Arts School. He holds a BA and MA degrees in philosophy and aesthetics from Seoul National University. He is also a very important researcher of theatre dance in South Korea. He has filmed almost all the dance performances in South Korea for the past twenty years.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>10</sup> The dance scholar, Che-sung An describes how New dance (*shinmuyong*) is strongly rooted in traditional Korean dance (in Haeree Choi, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> This notion of the project of modernity being 'incomplete' is, however, not original to Dussel but can be traced back to Habermas' claims that the modern project remains unfulfilled and should not be relinquished (quoted in Selden, 1997: 200).

<sup>12</sup> A personal interview with the head of dance department, Hae-jin Jeong, of Yewon Arts School (17 December 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Seung-hee Choi (1911 - ?) was one of the most famous Korean dancers during the early part of the twentieth century who gave many performances including a tour of Europe and the USA. Preferring communism, she moved to North Korea in 1947. As a result very little is known about her subsequent life.



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<sup>14</sup> See Byeong-ho Chung, 1993.

<sup>15</sup> See Jong-uk Kim 1993.

<sup>16</sup> Yewon Arts School is the most famous art school in South Korea. Consequently, competition for entrance is particularly fierce.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Hae-jin Jeong, 17/12/2001.

<sup>18</sup> According to the 1995 data, 4,699 dance students registered at the 48 universities (*Culture and Arts Statistics In Korean*, 1996: 94-5).

<sup>19</sup> *Culture and Arts Statistics In Korean* shows that there were 1,983 dance performances in 1999 in South Korea, an increase of 24 percent over the previous year. In terms of dance genres, traditional Korean dance logged 324 dance performances (1998 had 473 dance performances), a decrease of 31.5 percent. Korean Creative dance<sup>19</sup> had 441 dance performances (1998 had 280 dance performances), an increase of 57.5%, and modern dance numbered 361 dance performances compared with 272 in 1998, an increase of 32.7%. Finally, there were 264 ballet performances (compared with 197 in 1998), which is an increase of 34%.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Seldom, Widdowson and Brooker (1985: 236).

<sup>21</sup> Korea Women's Associations United (KWAU) is a federation of feminist organisations in South Korea. According to the Website of the KWAU 'it was created on February 18, 1987 to unite the power of women's organizations working for women's rights and democracy. Currently KWAU has 5 regional sections and 28 member organizations, representing the progressive women's movement in Korea' ([www.women21.or.kr](http://www.women21.or.kr)).

<sup>22</sup> Feminist artists who believe that the twenty-first-century will be a feminist period established FAN in February 1992. By examining such areas as theatre, literature, film, music and the visual arts their concern is with exposing the operation of Patriarchal codes upon cultural practice and developing feminist alternatives ([www.femiart.co.kr](http://www.femiart.co.kr)).

<sup>23</sup> Chae interviewed Yeol-kyu Kim on 30/11/1981. The interview was published in *Choom* (January 1982) and also in Chae's text (2000: 48).

<sup>24</sup> See the programme note of the 1999 National Dance Festival.

<sup>25</sup> Pavis (1996: 5) goes on to point out that interculturalism must be distinguished from 'other concepts with which it is often implicitly associated'. These, he suggests, include intraculturalism (the search for national traditions'), transculturalism (to transcend the particular in favour of the universal), ultraculturalism (the 'mythic quest for the origins and the supposed lost purity of the theatre'), preculturalism (slightly different to ultraculturalism in that the search becomes for what is common to both eastern and western performance practices prior to their 'acculturation'), postculturalism (closely associated with postmodernism in its strategy of recycling fragments 'seized from the most diverse cultural contexts') and metaculturalism (wherein, he explains, from a 'superior position, one culture comments upon another). Elsewhere, as Sally Ann Ness (2000: 248) points out, cross-cultural study has, in the last part of the twentieth century 'produced a dazzling array of methodological activity', replete with its own, sometimes bewildering, terminological framework.

## **Chapter Two.**

### **Traditional Korean dance: a historical perspective.**

## 2.1. Introduction.

A key principle put forward by members of the National Dance movement is an emphasis upon indigenous characteristics in the evolution of traditional Korean dance forms. The oldest and most representative of these is shaman dance which suggests that its examination would provide a valuable insight into what constitutes traditional characteristics. Based upon this background it should then be possible to trace to what extent these indigenous characteristics have been absorbed into, and contributed to the development of, other traditional Korean dances. This mode of enquiry then forms the first strategy for overcoming Eurocentrism in South Korean dance practice.

Dance ethnographer Deidre Sklar (2000: 70) contends that dance, as a social production, is different in each society. Following this argument, Korean dance cannot be understood without consideration of its socio-political background. To this end, the characteristics of traditional Korean dance need to be explored as they exist within and comment upon their social context.

## 2.2. Evolution of traditional dance.

According to the Crowther in *Oxford Dictionary* (1995), the term 'tradition' means 'the passing of beliefs and customs from one generation to the next'. There are, however, two main attitudes related to tradition.

One view is that tradition is an adherence to beliefs, customs and cultures created in the past. According to Edward Shils (1981), this view is derived from the progressive thinking of the Enlightenment that minimises the evaluation of traditions in assessments of the present and future. In other words, traditions are the detritus of the forward movement of society. This argument can be readily linked to a Eurocentric assumption that Western civilisation is more creative or progressive than non-Western or non-industrialised societies. As such, traditions in non-Western and non-industrialised societies can be seen as detrimental forces that restrict the progress of civilisation. According to some anthropologists and folklorists, traditions are thus regarded as stable and immutable texts that are passively received.

The other view regards tradition as the framework upon which new conventions can settle. To this end, Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt (1973: 3) argues that 'tradition is a framework for creativity because intellectuals may, through their critical stance toward tradition, serve to create some new tradition'. Furthermore, Shils (1981: vii) argues that tradition is basic to the ways that societies function. He goes on to point out that tradition emerges from the need to direct action with things, works, words and modes of conduct created in the past. If this is true then it must also be that creativity arises from the internalisation of tradition. Chae (1985: 127) elsewhere argues that 'tradition' has agency. He explains, 'since any present action takes into account the past, as well as individual preference and social influence, tradition appears as an active force rather than as a relic in people's lives' (translation). Accordingly, tradition is no longer static and immutable but, rather dynamic and adaptable.



This idea of tradition as a creative impetus is distinctly modern wherein, according to Lincoln Kirstein (1983: 106), 'the ability to create is not limited to artists or writers but extends to many more, and perhaps to all areas of human activity and endeavour'. In contrast, the notion of tradition as intact, immutable and received passively is based on an 'elitism' wherein only exceptional and cultivated minds are able to create where nothing existed previously. What is then 'created' is then received passively by the public. According to Chae (1985), however, the linking of creativity to tradition disavows this 'elitism.'

Similar debates on the meaning of tradition in South Korea appeared around the government initiated folk revival that unfolded throughout the 1960s and 70s. Recognising that the indigenous identity of Korean culture had been diminished due to the impact of Colonialism, the government of Park Chung Hee, under the banner of preservation and promotion of Korean cultural heritage, passed a law; the *Munwhajae-bohobeop* (Cultural Asset Preservation Law, 1962). The law designated that those who possessed indigenous knowledge and skills in either performance arts or crafts should be given the title *Muhyŏng Munwhajae* (Intangible Cultural Property).<sup>1</sup> According to the Department of Cultural Properties,

Intangible Cultural Properties are defined as performers of traditional arts, such as music, dance, drama, ritual and martial art, and traditional techniques of making crafts and foods, which possess historical and academic values' (translation).<sup>2</sup>

There are two categories of Cultural Property: *Yuhyeong Munwhajae* (Tangible Cultural Properties) which includes museum artefacts and old buildings, and *Muhyŏng Munwhajae* (Intangible Cultural Properties) such as 'folk rituals' and 'traditional dance.' To become an Intangible Cultural Asset, applicants must achieve a high score in the National Folk Contest supervised by the Department of Cultural Properties of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Once selected, the government finances the artist and their institution for instruction and performance.

Although the intention is to foster self-esteem and national pride in South Korea, this government policy has been criticised by some folklorists and cultural critics. One of the representative South Korean folklorists, U-sung Sim (in *Minjok-Yesul*, 1999: 63), points out that, rather than fostering national identity, the government policy has 'isolated local people from their own folk cultures'. He adds:

when a only a few people are appointed as Human Cultural Properties of a local folk dance, other local people tend to feel that their dance no longer belongs to them. They would rather watch the Human Cultural Properties ' performance on television.

(translation)

U-sung Sim goes on to explain how this government-sponsored system has led to both a sense of isolation amongst artists and also community ambivalence:

Why should I manage our folk ritual on my own, which I have done together with my neighbours before? Since the folk ritual was selected as an Intangible Cultural Property, our local people do not seem to be concerned with it. Some people say that it's not my job but your job, because the government gives you money, not me. Nowadays, it is so hard for us to co-operate with one another for the folk ritual.

(translation)

Another problem with this government policy is the transformation of traditional folk arts into a competition. Leading figure of the citizen-initiated folk revival movement and dance scholar Chae (1985: 139-141) points out that, since folk tradition is an indigenous practice reserved in the social and cultural experience of a specific local people, 'it cannot be judged by some criteria which have been carefully examined'.

Moreover,

the adjudicators of the National Folk Contest judged whether a traditional performing art deserves to belong to the category of Intangible Cultural Properties by assessing the sophistication of dramatic plot or dance movement. Such a criterion might not be derived from indigenous aesthetics but from Western ones. It thus might bring about a serious distortion of the indigenous character of the folk arts.

(translation)

Most Korean mask dramas and dances were originally performed in-the-round and all the movements of the body and the development of the scenes were designed accordingly. This aspect of theatrical performance has, Dong-il Cho (1975) claims, been acknowledged as 'one of the most important modes of Korean folk art by many



aestheticians and folklorists'. An important criterion of judgement in the National Folk Contest, however, is how such folk pieces are suited to a proscenium theatre. Chae (1985:138) explains that 'the criteria for adjudication in the contest includes a modern modification of traditional arts as well as a preservation of originality; and a measure of modernisation was their adaptation to the proscenium-styled theatre' (translation). Therefore, Chae continues, participants tend to modify their performance in order to gain high marks and, as a result, indigenous characteristic of Korean folk arts are changed without any examination of how folk tradition is transmitted and modernised.

The Korean government's policy is therefore based on the 'intact, immutable' understanding of traditional cultures. As such, Chae (p.140) contends, this policy

can be thus criticised for ignoring the people's creative potential and isolating the people from matters of the folk revival. The policy also cannot avoid being blamed for distorting many of the indigenous features seen in Korean folk traditions.

(translation)

According to Sim (1999: 67), as a result of this government policy, many South Korean scholars and practitioners have become concerned with what might be the genuine development of tradition. Like Eisenstadt (1973), Shils (1981) and Kristeller (1983), Chae (1985: 22) defines tradition as a 'reserved body' which 'has been accumulated with historical realities' and a 'potential body of social development' which is always open to creative practices. Paradoxically however, he argues that tradition is not an adherence to



the past but 'a situation breaking something to be broken, and not staying in "being", but going forward, "ought to be" ' (p.124). Following this meaning of tradition, the devolution of traditional arts goes beyond the preservation of originalities. Neither is it a simple articulation into western modes. Instead, the devolution of traditional arts means 'creating a new mode which can represent modern life as effectively as it has expressed life in the past' (Kim, 1987: 67). For those attempting to create a 'new' Korean dance, Kim contends (p.70), 'this means creating new modes to represent today's life by reviving dance's expressive sources transmitted from generation to generation in the past, rather than primarily copying the originalities of traditional dances and simply articulating them into western theatrical modes' (translation).

Kim's emphasis upon 'reviving expressive sources' of traditional Korean dances is the underlying principle of the National Dance movement and one of the main proponents of their choreographic output. The most important of these 'expressive sources' is shaman dance.

### 2.3. Korean shaman dance.

Ki-baek Lee (1967) notes that traditional Korean dances such as court and folk dance have their origin in prehistoric religious rites. As he points out, people in the Neolithic age believed that there were immortal spirits in human beings as well as in natural phenomena such as mountains, rivers and trees. Moreover, while 'bad' spirits cause misfortune, 'good' spirits bring luck. The ritual practitioners, who act as intermediaries

with the spirit world, were needed to repel evil spirits and recall helping spirits. They were called 'shaman' by the Tungus of Siberia (Lee, 1967: 23). According to Mircea Eliade's (1957) interpretation of Russian ethnographies, the shaman adopts an ecstatic or trance-like state in order to journey to the realm of the spirits. While in this state, the shaman is able to seek help from the spirits in order to prevent disaster or cure disease. According to Lee (1967: 24) this journey is perceived both as a flight and a form of possession. Moreover, Lee adds,

The shaman also binds society together by preserving historical knowledge and by performing community exorcisms. 'Shamanism' is the label for these practices, and is used by extension for similar activities among Arctic and Ural-Altaic groups. Eliade found shamans among the Lapps, Inuit, American Indians, the Ainu of Japan and the Koreans, in many parts of Southeast Asia, and elsewhere, existing as a result of diffusion and cultural survival.

(translation)

With the emergence of tribal federations in the first century AD, and the separation of rites and politics, shamans took on a more direct political responsibility within their clans. The power of the shaman and the dominance of shamanism in Korean people's religious consciousness remained virtually unchallenged until the emergence of the *Choseon* dynasty in 1392 (Hak-seon Im 1995).

With its world view of Confucianism, the *Choseon* dynasty (1392-1910) denigrated shaman rituals as *umsa*, a term that implied something obscene or vulgar, and shamans were degraded into the low class of society (Keith Howard, 1996: 135). In 1431, court women were banned from visiting the corrupting houses of shamans. The *Kyeongguk*



*taejeon*, a legal code adopted in 1474, prohibited the 'calling down' of heretical gods and ordered shamans to live outside the walls of Seoul (p.136). Despite the *Choseon* dynasty's contemptuous treatment of shamanism, however, these rituals still remained widespread. The shaman was no longer a governor who would rule a clan or tribe with the supposed ability to intermediate between the human and divine worlds, but just a healer or prophet who would cope with the people's pains and wishes by engaging dialogue with the spirits. Shamanism was no longer a dominant religion initiated by rulers, but secularised as a folk belief. According to Im (1998: 41), the shaman little more than a fortune-teller and performer in village festivals.

Unlike the practice of spiritualism in the West, shamanism in East Asian countries is a form of performance in which dances and songs play the dominant part (Lee, 1967). Moreover, while the political agency of the shaman has gradually diminished, this performance aspect has continued to develop and take on an important part in the evolution of traditional Korean dance practice.

Traditional dance specialists have developed many parts of the original shaman rituals into the traditional dances that can be seen today. As Im (1995: 41-43) verifies, 'shaman dance evolved into representative traditional Korean dances' such as *Ch'eoyong-mu* (the 39<sup>th</sup> Important Intangible Cultural Property), *Taepyeong-mu* (the 92<sup>nd</sup> Important Intangible Cultural Property), and *Salp'uri* (the 97<sup>th</sup> Important Intangible Cultural Property).<sup>3</sup> In order to understand the ways in which shaman rituals contributed to the evolution of traditional Korean dances such as these, it is important to identify some of the key characteristics of shaman dance.

### 2.3.1. The types of shaman dance.

There are two basic types of Korean shaman dance: 'possession' and 'hereditary' (Howard, 1996: 137-9). Possession type shamans become priests after receiving a spirit. Before becoming shamans, they often suffer from an unexplained illness that mysteriously disappears upon initiation. They then become a helper until they mature and begin to practise shaman rituals. Possession type shamans from across the Korean peninsula have today congregated in big cities like Seoul. As urban life shifts concerns away from the farm and soil, shamans tell fortunes and ensure individual and family prosperity by offering small rituals at their own personal shrines.

Unlike 'Possession' shamans, Hereditary shamans inherit their abilities from their family. They are said to lack any conscious knowledge of spirits but, rather, base their claim to shamanism on their skill in music, dance and recitation. Usually living at the edge of a village, they perform small rituals to promote health, wealth and happiness for their individual clients. They also pray for a bumper harvest during village festivals such as Harvest Moon Day (*chuseok*) and Big Moon Day.

Differences exist between the dances as practised by the two types of shaman.

Possession shamans usually perform a solo dance in rituals. As Gil-seong Choi (1995: 50) notes, the dance of possession shamans is supposed to be automatically or unconsciously danced with the descent of spirits in rituals. It is also, he adds, characterised by a repeated shift between static and dynamic moods. The possession dance at first demonstrates slow, horizontal and turning movements, later changing into



fast, vertical jumping movements. An idiosyncratic jumping movement exemplifies the distinctive characteristic of possession dances. Shamans repeatedly jump off the ground with both feet to signify that they are receiving the spirits into their body. Their jumping gradually becomes faster, higher and more energetic as they approach an ecstatic state. According to Byeong-ho Chung, (1985: 331),

the jumping dance of shamans comes from the magical folk custom in which farmers tread down the earth as a symbol of receiving the spirits of the sky and repelling the spirits of the ground in order to promote the growth of crops. Shamans usually dance to the accompaniment of some percussion instruments such as *janggu* (a kind of drum), *jing* (a kind of gong) and *buk* (a kind of drum), and use small bells and folding fans as props. For the static mood, the instruments would be slowly and gently played, and the shamans would use the small bells. For the ecstatic state, the instruments would be quickly and loudly played, and the shamans would use the folding fans.

(translation)

The dance of hereditary shamans is taught by senior family members (mainly the mother or mother-in-law). Moreover, a shaman's reputation depends on their skill in dance and recitation. Thus, the hereditary shamans usually believe that being well trained guarantees good assistance from the spirits. They tend to consider communication with audiences (their clients) rather than self-intoxication as an important matter in their performance. In this regard, Gil-seong Choi (1995: 53) argues that the hereditary shaman dance has artistic properties, while possession type dances reside in their emphasis on enchantment. The hereditary shaman dance also shows progression from a static mood to a dynamic mood. In the dynamic mood, the dancer

shows a repeated alternation between the fast, turning movements and hopping movements:

Unlike the jumping movement of possession type shaman dance, hereditary shamans hop 'from one foot to the other' on 'the same spot'. In contrast to possession shamans, hereditary shamans usually dance in a group, and use a folding fan as a prop rather than small bells. The movement line of the fan has an important meaning in receiving and expelling spirits.

(translation)

### 2.3.2. The progress of the shaman dance and its features.

There are three main parts in a shaman ritual. First, known as *Apuri*, a shaman calls the spirits of the dead into the ritual place. Second, *Bonpuri*, the shaman soothes the pains of the spirits and interprets their resentments to the audience. The last part, *Duepuri*, is a scene wherein the shaman sends the spirits peacefully and safely back to the world beyond. Many traditional Korean performing arts follow this three-part formula.

In the opening part, the shaman purifies the performance arena of all but those spirits important to the ritual. It is also the point at which the shaman invites the audience to not only view but participate in the performance. The act of purification involves the shaman throwing water onto the ground while dancing with slow movements around a small altar. Afterwards, the shaman bows at this altar as a way of requesting the attendance of the required spirits. As Im (1995: 43) notes, a more formalised version of this opening activity can be recognised in many traditional Korean dances such as

*Teobeolim Ch'um* and *Bujeonnnori Ch'um*. *Teobeolim Ch'um* is often danced at the beginning of village festivals and symbolises the 'treading down the gods of the earth' in order to repel bad spirits from a villager's house and call helping spirits. Im also points out that, in *Teobeolim Ch'um*, several performers dance while beating a small *gong*. Moving slowly at first, they gradually become more animated and incorporate a distinctive jumping movement that represents treading down the earth. The symbolic use of the feet is also central to *Bujeonnnori Ch'um*. According to Im (1995), the purpose of this dance is to expel sundry spirits and call to the spirit of a dead national hero.

The second, and most substantial, part of the shaman ritual is a scene wherein a shaman soothes the anguish of spirits. In shamanism, the pains of spirits are believed to be the same as those of the villagers. People's physical and mental pain is believed to come from diverse causes such as illness, natural disasters or unhappy relationships.

According to shamanism, the people's suffering is due to the malice of bad spirits being carried into society by ghosts. This spiritual malice is called *sal*, while 'the grudge derived from such a state' is referred to as *han*. The main part of shaman ritual is therefore the process whereby the shaman attempts to remove the *sal* and appease the *han* (Im, 1995).

Along the southwest coast of Korea, the main part of the shaman ritual is known as *Ssikkim kut*.<sup>4</sup> According to Su-sung Oh (1998), in *Ssikkim kut*, the shaman recounts the links that bind the dead soul to the living world. This recitation 'soothes' the pains of the dead and leads the spirit safely to heaven. In the *Ssikkim kut* of Jeolla province, for example, a large cloth of white cotton is held by audience members over the

performance area. The shaman cuts through the centre of this with his/her body (see Figure 1).

There are seven knots in the cloth. The knots are supposed to be the bruises in which the pains of the dead come into bearing. The shaman undoes the seven knots one by one, while dancing and conveying the utterances of the spirit to the bereaved family.

(Im, 1995: 45, translation)

The untying of these knots symbolises the spirit of the dead becoming free from any attachment to the present world (Cultural Properties Administration, 1983: 13). How well this part of the ritual is performed is a deciding factor in the artistic merit of the shaman.



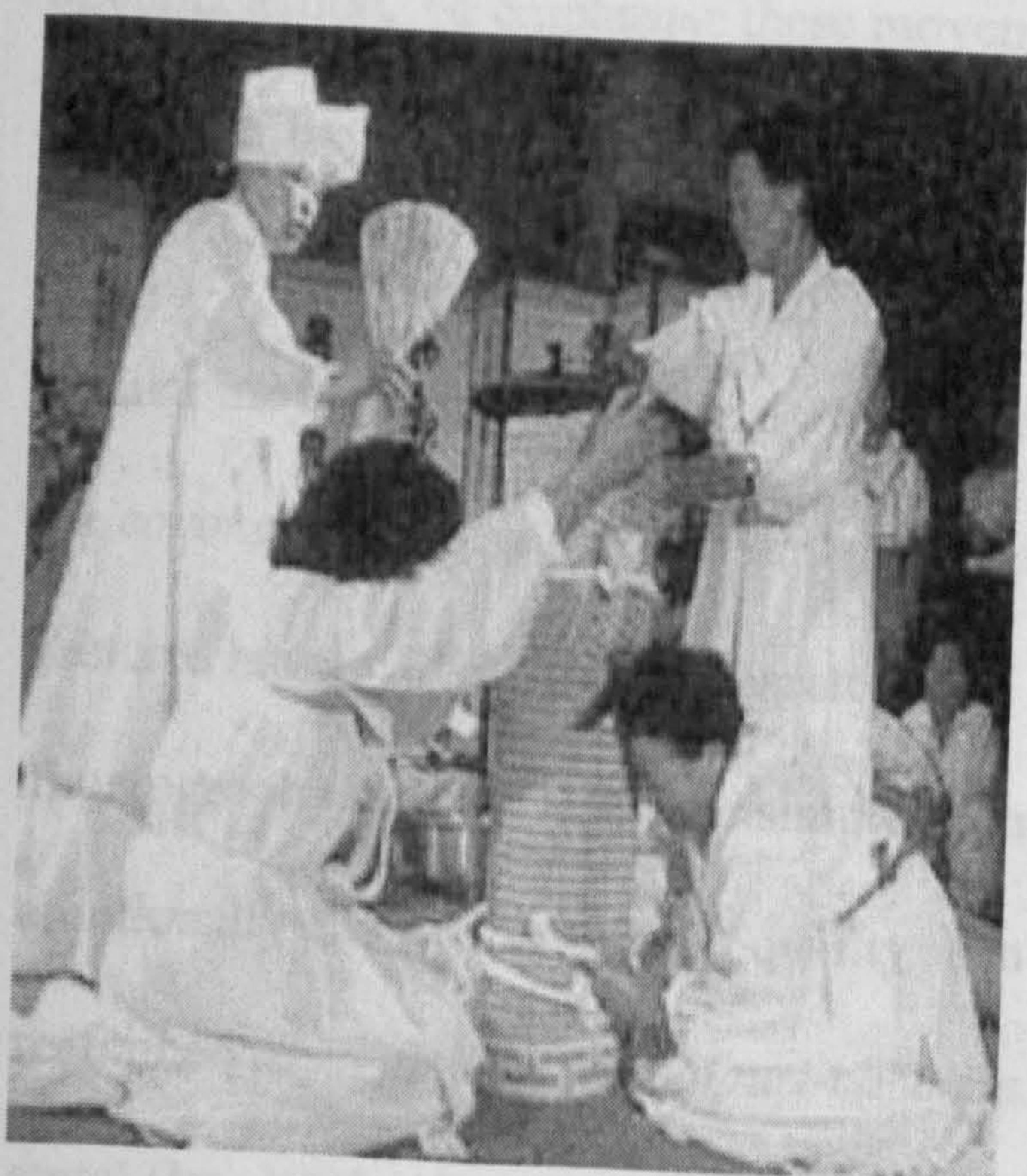
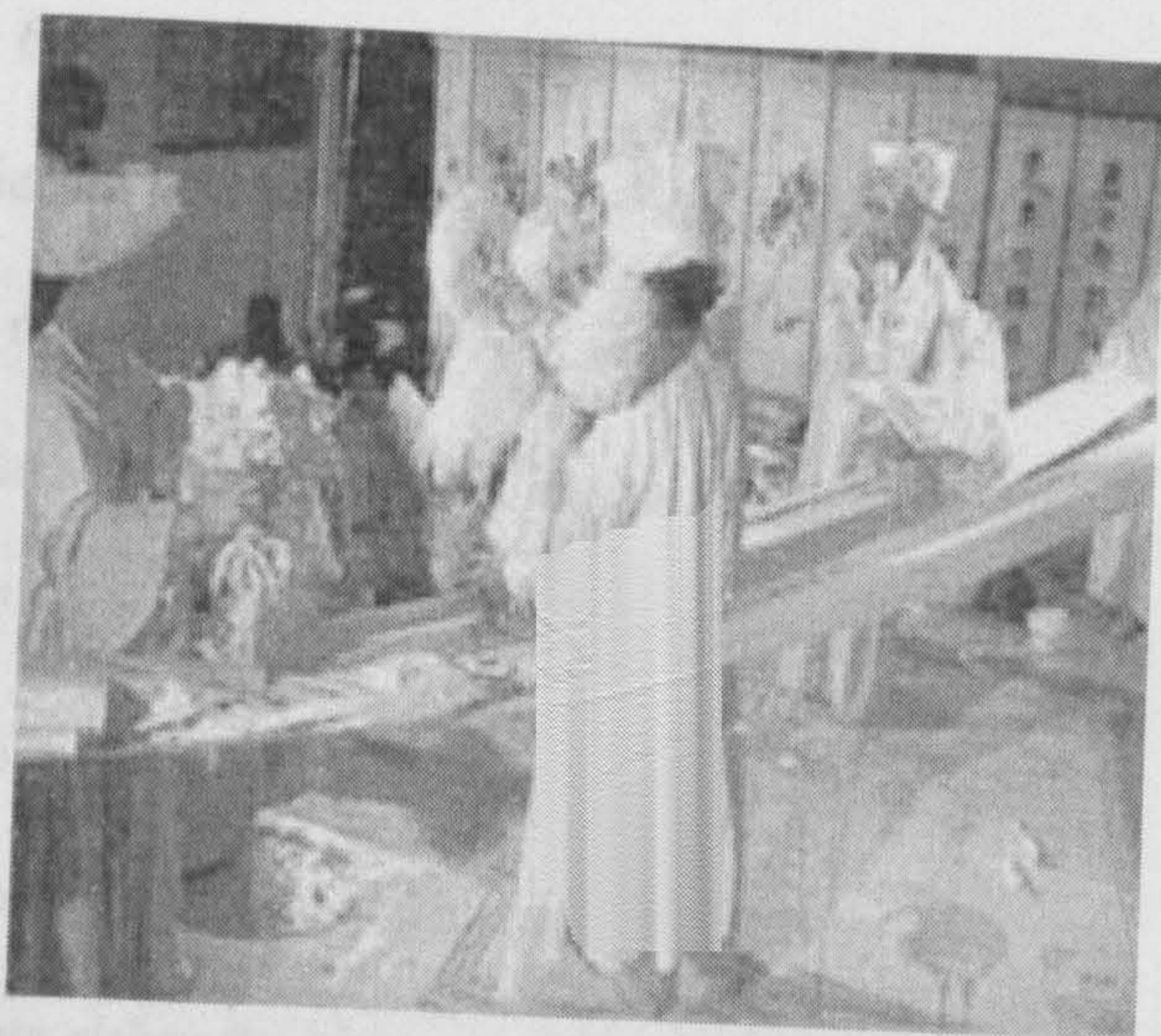


Figure 1: *Ssikkim kut*.



According to Yeol-kyo Kim (in Chae, 2000: 60-62), Korean dance is structured according to the interrelationship between 'tie' and 'untie' or 'grudge' and 'release'. This interpretation can also be applied to the movement quality of Korean dance. An example of this is the spreading and folding arm movements used in shaman dances. To symbolise the release of pains and grudges of the spirits, shamans wrap both arms around the front and back of their bodies before spreading them out again. Another similar gesture is the circular movement of both arms above the head followed by an opening action. To emphasise these movements either the sleeves of the costumes extend far beyond the end of the arms or the dancers hold long pieces of cloth.

Similar movements can be found everywhere in traditional Korean dances such as *Ch'eoyong-mu*, *Taepyeong-mu* and mask dances. Moreover, these shaman-based gestures have evolved into a separate dance called *salpuri-ch'um* wherein the choreography is based upon the simple gesture of tying and untying knots.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the emotionally charged movement quality seen in shaman rituals, however, the 'highly restrained movement of the *salpuri-ch'um* is often interpreted as an artistically mature state' (Im, 1995: 42). As Im suggests, the process of evolution has replaced the direct symbolic language of the shaman ritual with something more abstract, even intangible.





Figure 2: *Salpuri-ch'um* by Ingan Munwhajae (intangible property) Mae-bang Lee.

The third part of the shaman ritual symbolises the guiding of the spirits of the dead back to the world beyond. In the last part of *Ssikkim kut*, for example, the spirits of the dead become free from the physical world and, with the shaman 'paving' the way, ascend to heaven; the shaman usually holding a model ship on which the spirits can travel. In the possession type shaman ritual, however, and as Tae-won Kim (1980: 311) points out, 'the shaman tears off a long, white cotton cloth that symbolises the bridge linking the world here to the world beyond'. The scene, he adds, serves either 'to express the complete severance' from the present world or 'emancipation from the pains of physical life'.



Common to all the different versions of the shaman ritual is the final sequence wherein the shaman leads the other members of the troupe and the audience in the 'uniting scene' that is supposed to strengthen communitarian consciousness. Because the spirit was once a member of the community in which the shaman ritual is performed there is a shared understanding amongst the audience of the pains suffered by the spirit. This mutuality between members of the village or family and those from 'the world beyond' is the communitarian characteristic of shaman rituals. Not only do all the participants in the ritual share the desire to relieve the suffering of the spirits but also emancipate themselves from hardship. At the end of the ritual, the shaman and the audience dance and sing together, and share food and wine: the symbolic activity of the ritual having a very real social purpose, that is the reinforcement of the communitarian consciousness of the village.

Another important characteristic of the shaman ritual that reinforces this sense of communitarian consciousness is the transference of 'chi' energy. Often shamans are weak physically and, more particularly, 'possession' shamans may have some disability. Furthermore, and as Gil-seong Choi (1995: 49) remarks, people often become shamans when they suddenly become ill and when more orthodox forms of medical treatment are ineffective. The underlying belief is that, by helping people who are more ill than themselves, shamans can also improve their own health. This is achieved through an exchange of *chi* (energy) from one physical body to another either by direct physical contact with that part of the patient's body that is damaged or diseased or through indirect means such as eye-contact.



#### 2.4. Philosophy and characteristics of traditional Korean dance:

Because it is an ever-changing cultural practice, open to the effects of history, politics and philosophy, it is difficult to define the characteristics of traditional Korean dance. Such a scheme is further complicated by the late twentieth early twenty-first century multicultural development of South Korea. Two reasons for pursuing this agenda, however, remain. First, so that the value of traditional Korean dance, undermined by colonial power, may be recovered. A supremacist notion of Western culture in relation to inferior traditional Korean culture has led to an uneven playing field and dualistic discourse of give/take, centre/periphery, right/ wrong and beauty/ ugliness.

The second reason for this categorisation is that an investigation of traditional characteristics should prove useful to an understanding of contemporary Korean dance. On this point, Malborg Kim (2002) suggests that, because the characteristics and structure of works of art are different in Korea and the West, Korean dance cannot be interpreted according to Western standards. No universal theory of dance exists. As a possible antidote to what she sees as a tendency to read all forms of dance, regardless of socio-historic background, according to Western models Kim explores 'the differences in the mentalities between the east and the west evident in dance'. Her approach is to make comparisons between the philosophies of East and the West and then apply these to dance theory. In East Asia, in particular, the basic philosophy and characteristics underlying dance are shared with games, art, music, play and rituals. Kim's findings will therefore be examined as to their usefulness in this investigation. In addition, several other literary texts will be discussed as they contribute to an understanding of

traditional Korean dance practice and theory, namely *Communitarian Dance and Joyful Dance* (1985) and *What is the philosophy of Korean dance?* (2000) both by Hee-wan Chae, 'A Comparative Study of the Primitive Characters of the Dance in View of Differences between the Eastern and the Western Culture' by Byeong-ok Lee and 'The Differences in the Mentalities between the East and the West Evident in Dance' by Malborg Kim.<sup>6</sup> As the main aim of this enquiry is with overcoming Eurocentrism, the concern becomes to what extent these writers differentiate between East and West and how this can contribute to a more 'Korean sympathetic' understanding of traditional dance.

As has already been pointed out, shaman dance is not only one of the oldest traditional Korean dance forms but also one of the most influential. As Kim contends, because it articulates a 'magical' spiritualism, it has played an instrumental part in the development not only of other dance forms but also many branches of Eastern religion and philosophy. She remarks that '.... the fundamental elements of dance in North Asia which embody Eastern ideology such as Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism [are] commonly shared by Korea, China and Japan.' Moreover, this sense of agency has, in contemporary Korea, manifested itself into a commentary upon the prevailing political, economic and cultural situation.

The Korean dance anthropologist, Byeong-ok Lee (2002: 25), identifies four fundamental differences between Eastern and Western dance. First, in the East, a close proximity between dance-space and audience has developed that allows for the short arms and legs, and the smooth and flat face of the dancer to be clearly visible. In

comparison, in the West, the emphasis is upon distance and large-scale performances. Second, due to the experience of the 'glacial epoch', Eastern people generally have a bent knee walking form and posture, while having lived in a warmer climate, Western people adopt a more extended gait and stance. Third, a cold northeast Asian climate has led to a 'shrunk chest' dance style that contrasts with the more expansive chest used in Western dances. Fourth, Eastern dancers tend to cover their arms and legs not only to protect themselves against the cold but due to a reluctance to expose their bodies. Western dancers, on the other hand, can rely upon warmer weather and a less inhibited attitude towards revealing their own bodies.

Lee's essentialist and ahistorical argument is not only based on climactic but also on anthropological difference. Not only does it fail to acknowledge that many Western countries are colder than those in East Asia but it ignores the impact of social, political, philosophical and cultural backgrounds. Although the premise for Lee's reasoning is too problematic to be of any value to this study it does exemplify the current level of research on Korean dance.

As a possible antidote to such essentialist rhetoric, the line of enquiry pursued in this investigation will be the comparison of two specific dance styles: ballet and traditional Korean dance. There are two other reasons for pursuing this agenda. First, ballet is one of the dominant dance genres in South Korea and, as such, has influenced the development of Korean dance culture and imposed a western aesthetic value upon other, indigenous, dance forms. Second, ballet is one of the oldest theatre dance forms in the West and, like shaman dance in Korea, has fostered many derivatives.



Furthermore, to avoid the problems associated with essentialist rhetoric, specific examples taken from the traditional Korean dance canon will be discussed. While Korean traditional dance is a diverse field, however, only one style of ballet is practised in Korea, namely classical ballet. As such, the danger of adopting a generalised 'notion' of ballet is negligible.

#### 2.4.1. Communitarianism.

Kim (2002) argues that Greek art began as *imitation* of nature, while, in the East, it began as an *adaptation* of nature. Furthermore, while Western philosophy is based on a duality of subject and object, Eastern philosophy is a monism that sees humans as a part of nature. In keeping with this comparison, it can be claimed that, in Eastern thinking, the 'mind' of nature is the same as that of humans. Moreover, art is a harmonic balance between 'nature' and 'humanity' and the purpose of art, in the Eastern view, is the communication between the two.

One of the key characteristic features of Korean shaman dance already identified is its Communitarianism; the way in which it creates a dialogue between the spiritual and the physical world. In shaman rituals, the shaman fights with the ghosts of diseases, famine or droughts as a mandate by the villagers. The shaman dance symbolises the people's desire to overcome common enemies such as natural disasters or would-be conquerors. Moreover, historically, Korean shaman dance was built around community-based needs such as a prayer to protect fishermen and provide them with a good haul of fish, a ritual for the healing of incurable diseases or bringing rain or asking for a good harvest.

Today, the shaman has clients who each give a retainer twice annually in the form of barley in the spring or rice in the autumn. In return, the shaman performs a ritual whenever the clients' need arises. As Bou-yong Rhi (1995: 35) points out, such rituals are for telling villagers' fortunes or 'healing their illnesses'. Moreover, the shaman will practise a ritual to wish for rain for the villagers when a drought occurs in the village, and will lead regular rituals to pray for a bumper harvest or good haul during the village festivals (Sang-il Lee, 2000). As Chae (2000: 120) adds, 'as the shaman ritual is a product of local fraternity and sorority, shaman dance reflects the ritual's communitarian character'. Elsewhere, according to Gil-seong Choi, (1995: 52),

In the shaman ritual, a shaman usually expresses magical self-intoxication. However, even though the shaman intoxicates herself/himself, she/he will often be considered to be a good shaman when she/he properly employs collective feelings and emotions within her/his own expression.

(translation)

In contrast to the more serious aims of shaman dance, in mask dance (*talch'um*), one of the main subject matters is the satirising of corrupt members of the nobility and Buddhists. It also provides a humorous escape from the sometimes harsh existence of the self populace. Historically, most traditional mask dances in Korea were a means of criticising the prevailing feudal social order and providing a platform for anti-establishment feeling. Dong-il Cho (1975) notes that, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the emerging merchant class supported the mask dance because it attracted a large audience who could then be encouraged to spend money. Even after the



fall of feudalism and rise of capitalism in Korea during the late twentieth century, this anti-establishment ideology was retained only the new focus was on parodying all forms of authoritarian power.



Figure 3: *Bongsan* mask dance.<sup>7</sup>

*Kangkansuwolae*, a popular Korean folk dance, was originally danced only by a group of village women.<sup>8</sup> Dressed in plain white costumes, these females used their participation as a form of emotional release; a means of expressing otherwise repressed feelings. To symbolise the full moon, the women would form various circular patterns by linking hands. This was also a demonstration of how combined activity could lead to a good harvest. According to Yeol-kyu Kim (1981), these circular patterns can also be interpreted as the circle of life - birth, death and re-birth - and the oneness between humanity and nature. As such the dance provided a close bond between women in an



intimate space that they could share and from which men were excluded: a female Communitarianism.

Today, however, this communitarian aspect has developed and everybody can take part without regard to gender or class. This sense of unity is also retained by the ordinary clothing worn by the dancers, implying that the performance is intimately linked with the day-to-day existence of the participants. Furthermore, and as Kim suggests, alongside this communitarian characteristic, another key aspect of the choreography has been retained; the transformation of the ordinary into the extra-ordinary.

#### 2.4.2. Magical realism.

This transformative ability of traditional Korean dance can be described as its 'magical realism'. Although scholars do not use this term when discussing Korean dance, key aspects of its etymology, as described in the *Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia* (1942), support its use in this investigation:

The term was first applied to literature in the 1940s by the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980), who recognized the tendency of his region's contemporary storytellers as well as contemporary novelists to illuminate the mundane by means of the fabulous. Prominent practitioners include G. García Márquez, J. Amado, J. L. Borges, M. A. Asturias, J. Cortázar, and Isabel Allende.

According to Theo L. D'haen (in Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, 1995), the term 'magical realism' first appears in specific literatures of Germany and Austria before it is became widely used in Latin America. D'haen also suggests that the international use of the term came about as a result of critiques of García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967).

For example, according to Jean Franco, the term 'magical realism' refers to novels that incorporate myth and legend into the narrative. Elsewhere, Linda Hutchinson (1989) defines 'Magical realism' as the absorption of fantasy into the conventions of literary realism. Furthermore both D'haen and Hutchinson identify a clear link between the essence of magical realism and many of the key aspects of the postmodern movement: art as self-reflexive and playful, the deconstruction of unity of character and narration, and a denial of objectivity.

Due to this thematic link with postmodernism, 'magical realism' has also been applied to discussions of post-colonial third-world culture wherein the notion of 'off-centre' is recognised as a key attribute. According to D'haen (1995), in both postmodernism and magical realism, any notion of a 'dominant' or 'privileged' discourse is deconstructed. In its place, emphasis is given to the ethnically, culturally or politically marginalised. As such, and although the term was originally used in reference to Latin American literature, this notion of 'the peripheral' lends magical realism a global mandate. For example, Korean literary critic Gi-uk Han (1999: 63) asserts that, while magical realism is 'a literary phenomenon characterized by the matter-of-fact incorporation of fantastic or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction in Latin-America', it can equally be

applied to post-colonial Korean novel writing.

The magical properties of traditional Korean dance (most notably shaman dance) have already been described in this chapter. Of concern was how the 'imaginary world' and 'the past' intersect with the 'real world' and 'the present'. In other words, the shaman ritual, by making multidimensional shifts both in time and space, fuses the symbolic with the actual. As Gi-uk Han elsewhere (1999: 62) explains:

The magical elements of shamanism provide more abundant expressive power than do the realistic modes. We can hereby find the expressive power of magical realism, in which realism is united with the supernatural and illusionary imagination seen in the narrative tradition of Latin America.

(translation)

Furthermore, Korean folkloric practices including shaman rituals, by calling upon the dead person's spirits, involve the deconstruction of the distinction between past and present, the world here and the world beyond. According to Chae (1985: 207-211), by the 'various scene and time shift techniques', it is possible to perform the 'total progress of history or one important political or private event' in its full context.

Other instances of magical realism can also be identified in other traditional forms. In Korean mask dance, for example, there is a 'ritual for the dead woman' in which the performer leads the audience in the 'uniting scene' that is meant to strengthen the consciousness of the community. This scene 'conjures' the soul of an old village woman named *Miyal*. A female performer who then re-enacts the harshness of *Miyal's*



life takes the role of this ghost. This concludes with a communal celebration through song and dance followed by the sharing of food and wine. The constant shift between the past and present and between the here-and now and the world beyond reflects the influence of folklore, especially that of shamanism.

*Ch'eoyong-mu* is another example of magical realism in Korean dance. *Ch'eoyong* is the name of a man who, according to fable, lived during the *Silla* Dynasty and whose wife was snatched by a ghost. According to Chae-hyeon Kim (1989), although capable of defeating the spirit and regaining his wife, *Ch'eoyong* put up no resistance and, instead, forgave the ghost. Because of this story of acceptance of loss and tolerance of personal sacrifice, some members of the rural populace of Korea create portraits of *Ch'eoyong* and hang them on the walls of their houses to ward off bad ghosts. Moreover, this dramatic depiction of the 'real' and the spiritual world has since become the basis for a Korean theatre dance work called *Ch'eoyong-mu*.

The magical characteristics of these traditional dances – shaman, mask and *Ch'eoyong-mu* - although predominantly a means of consolation and escapism can also be read as the articulation of a direct political strategy, that of emancipation.

#### 2.4.3. *He-bang* and *he-chae*.

The third characteristic of shaman dance is *he-bang* that translates as emancipation. The word *he-bang* is constructed by combining *he*, which means 'untie', 'dissect', 'scatter', 'take off' or 'disentangle' as well as 'perceive' and 'conversant', and *bang*, which

means 'put', 'place', 'gain' or 'unfold'. Therefore, *he-bang* means 'to untie a folded or restricted thing' or 'to free one's body (and the bodies of others) from restriction'. This can refer not only to political emancipation but also to spiritual freedom. Therefore *he-bang* has a wider scope than the English term emancipation.

The method of gaining *he-bang* is known as *he-chae* (*he* having the same meaning in both terms). According to the Chinese Korean dictionary, *he-chae* (that translates as deconstruction or dismemberment) means 'to scatter the parts of an organisation' or 'take a machine to pieces so that its parts cannot be reassembled'. Thus *he-chae* means 'to dissect something or some idea until one sees its essence'.

Moreover, the notion of *he-chae* (deconstruction) is a useful method for understanding traditional Korean dance. Understood as a form of monism, *he-chae*, can provide a means through which Western dichotomous constructs such self/other, truth/error, meaning/no meaning, reason/madness, centre/periphery, matter/mind, subject/object, body/mind, text/actuality, inside/outside, presence/absence and phenomenon/nature can be problematised. As Alan Schrift (1990: 193) points out, 'dichotomous confrontation is an example of western ideology's "violence hierarchy" and "subordinate order" '.

In traditional Korean dance, *he-chae* can be used to break down the barrier between theory/practice, choreography/improvisation, performer/audience, traditional dance/new dance, music/movement, beauty/abjection and past/present. In traditional Korean dance forms there is no difference between, for example, choreographer and dancer, and scholar and practitioner. Moreover, *he-chae* can be read as a strategy for overcoming the application of a scientific rationality in dance analysis, in that it allows for a

freedom of interpretation, there being no set relationship between movement and meaning. In respect to traditional dance, this deconstructionist agency – *he-chae* – has a specific goal, that is, the expressive desire for emancipation, or *he-bang*.

According to Hee-wan Chae (1985: 41), the notion of *he-bang* can be found in many types of traditional Korean dance including *Byeongsin-ch'um* (folly dance), shaman dance and *nongak* dance. It also appears in *Muemu*, a story that includes song and dance.

*Byeongsin-ch'um* (folly dance) is based on the movement of disabled people (*Byeongsin* meaning disabled person and *ch'um* meaning dance). *Byeongsin-ch'um* has no specific technique or fixed steps: rather the dancer can move freely to the percussive accompaniment. In other words, *Byeongsin-ch'um* represents the emancipation from more formal, and potentially more restrictive, codes of dance training and is open to anyone regardless of ability or disability. The emphasis is on 'fragmentation' 'imbalance' and 'improvisation' rather than 'unity', 'balance' and pre-meditated movement. According to Chae (1985: 41) *Byeongsin-ch'um*, as the articulation of freedom and emancipation from mental, physical and social illness, is an example of *he-bang* and *he-chae*.

A further example of the idea of *he-bang* can be found in *Muemu*, the story of a dancing monk called Wonhyo. This fictional character was a member of the *Wharang* which was the army in the Silla Dynasty during the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. He rejected what he believed to be a corrupt Buddhist authority and preached, through the use of song and dance, a return to Buddhism's founding principles (*Bolisalta*). Another part of the story



describes how he goes against the prevailing Buddhist rule to father a child with the princess *Yoseok*. The result of this act was the loss of his status and he was renamed *Bockseonggeosa* which means 'to start from bottom again'. The *he-bang* characteristics, articulated through the use of singing and dancing in this story, are first, as a popular vehicle for the articulation of *Bolisalta* and second, a means of emancipation from the burden of being party to the corruption of a sacred ideology.

Opinions as to the underlying emotion conveyed by Korean dance are divided between those traditionalists who, according to a borrowed dichotomy, see it as *han* (deep grief) and others who claim it as *hung* (joyful). For example, the Korean dancer I-jo Lim (in *Ballet International* 4/1998: 49) argues that 'a singular system of expression brings forth the inner emotional state of *han*'. He adds that, 'if dance fails to contain such *han* then it is not Korean dance'. This, however, is not a widely accepted opinion within Korean dance circles with other traditionalists claiming that an equally important part of Korean dance is its articulation of *hung* (joy, delight). As the description of *Byeongsin-ch'um* and, to a lesser extent, *Muemu* suggest, however, this duality is an inadequate method for understanding traditional Korean dance. The limitations imposed by the *han/hung* dichotomy can be demonstrated further in respect to an analysis of *nongak* dance.

Farmers, while playing traditional drums, originally danced *nongak* dance.<sup>9</sup> The movement, based on a simple walking pattern, depicts the action of sowing seeds in a field. Moreover, like shaman dance and *Byeongsin-ch'um* there is no specific technique or pre-composed steps. The performance is also not site-specific but takes the form of a



parade around the village. The performance dynamic is based on a tension between *hung* (joy, delight) conveyed through the rhythmic drumming and *han* (grief, sadness) conveyed by the heavy tread of the dancers who pray to the 'god of the earth' for a good harvest.

are not only incapable of fully accounting for this fusion of emotional states, but are also problematised.

Underlying this notion of *han* and *hung* is the concept of 'chi', a natural form of energy



Figure 4: Nongak.

To understand Chi we must look back to the very beginnings of Oriental Medicine. The concept of 'chi' (氣) which means 'The Way' (道) is the fundamental root of Oriental Medicine. The ancient Chinese people of Taoism's main focus was to observe the ways of the natural laws governing the universe as a method to understand the unseen inner world of our bodies.



As this description of *nongak* suggests both *han* and *hung* exist at the same time in traditional Korean dance. Furthermore both of these emotional states 'overlap', each one containing some sense of the other: the nearest equivalent in the Western lexicon being the notion of 'crying for joy'. As such, dualistic (and Western) codes of discourse are not only incapable of fully accounting for this fusion of emotional states, but are also problematised.

Underlying this notion of *han* and *hung* is the concept of 'chi', a natural form of energy that is believed to emanate from all living things, and that, in traditional Eastern culture, is manifested either as *yin* or *yang*. In respect to Korean dance, 'chi' provides a possible explanation not only for the performance dynamic and movement quality but also for the relationship between the dancer and the spectator.

#### 2.4.4. *Chi* and *yin-yang*.

The concepts of *chi* and *yin-yang* originated in China but quickly spread across other Northeast Asian countries including Japan, Thailand and Korea. According to Eastern philosophy, every living creature contains *chi* energy. It flows through the body and out across the universe. According to Karen Scheel:

To understand *Chi* we must look back to the very beginnings of Oriental Medicine to Taoism (pronounced: 'dow-ism') which means The Way. Taoism is the most influential root of Oriental Medicine. The ancient medicine people or Taoist's main focus was to observe the ways of the natural laws governing the universe as a method to understand the unseen inner world of our bodies.<sup>10</sup>



Traditional Oriental medicine has, for centuries, provided sufferers with a wide range of alternative treatments based on both a holistic approach to the body and the use of natural remedies. As Scheel explains, oriental medicine seems to be 'just what the doctor ordered and with its long history, many assume its techniques have been proved to work'.<sup>11</sup> She also asserts that many people are 'attracted by its emphasis on gentle remedies made from organic compounds'. Oriental medicine aims to improve bodily harmony and *chi* energy. According to Taoist philosophy *chi* is the energy accumulated by the quality of life as well as the food and air ingested.<sup>12</sup> People become ill if either they cannot absorb enough *chi* or the circulation in their body has become blocked. The Taoist belief is that it is important to maintain a flow of energy in the body because human beings cannot sustain life by only eating and breathing. They contend that even the most nutritious food is useless if the inner constitution is weak. As such *chi* healing is based on keeping a balance between the 'inner' *Yin* and *Yang* energies. This, in turn, allows for the absorption of '*chi*' energy from the outside world.<sup>13</sup>

*Chi* also means 'liveliness'. In relation to art, and according to the dance scholar Malborg Kim (2002), the practitioners' characteristics and thinking must appear through and by their *chi*. In other words, Kim interprets *chi* as a means of measuring artistic value wherein 'great' art stems not only from the mastery of technique but also through the development of a 'good' character (kindness/benevolence). Her argument is based on a traditionalist belief that, in Korean dance, the stress is upon the production of a harmonious fusion of, rather than dichotomous relationship between, *yin* and *yang*.

*Yin* is associated with water, earth, moon, ground, night, weak, and femininity while *yang* is associated with fire, heaven, sun, sky, day, strong and masculinity. As Scheel explains, *Yin* and *Yang* involves the uniting of the water energy of earth with the fire energy of heaven. These, she adds, are the two primary forces responsible for all creation:

Together this energetic life force of *Yin* and *Yang* is known as *Chi*, which means Energy. Einstein's famous equation concludes that energy forms matter and when matter disperses it coverts back to energy so every particle of existence is made of energy (*Chi*) and explains all movement, changes and phenomena in our universe.<sup>14</sup>

The *yin* and *yang* attain changes in the universe through the interaction of five material agents: water, wood, fire, earth, and metal. For example, fire is destroyed by water while trees can help prevent flooding by absorbing water from the ground. Moreover, as to whether one of these five material agents is *yin* or *yang* depends on the nature of their relationship. So, while water is *yin* to fire's *yang*, water can also be *yang* in relation to metal as *yin*. Alternatively, man is *yang* to a woman (as *yin*) but man also can be *yin* to another man.

These five agents and the concept of *yin-yang* are a universal explanatory principle behind such phenomena as: the movement of stars, the workings of the body, the nature of foods, the qualities of music, human ethical qualities, the progression of time, the operations of government and even the nature of historical change. For example,



according to this philosophy, the stars can be used to determine what kind of policy a government should pursue.

This production of *yin* from *yang* and *yang* from *yin* occurs cyclically and constantly, so that no one principle dominates or determines the other. All opposites such as health/sickness, wealth/poverty and power/submission can be explained according to the temporary dominance of one principle over the other. Since no one principle dominates eternally, all conditions can change into their opposite. Moreover, *Yin* does not suggest negative nor *yang* positive but rather, because they exist at the same time, constantly interact, support, harmonise, balance and change. As Kim (2000: 34) explains, '*Yin-yang* theory is a theory that explains creation and extinction of all things in the universe through the interaction of the *yin* and the *yang* as the conflicting concept, only they are effects rather than substance.'

Since, in *yin-yang* theory, one principle produces the other, all phenomena have within them the seeds of their opposite. For example, sickness has the seeds of health and vice-versa. As such, there is no such thing as perfect health as health contains the principle of its opposite, sickness. This is called the 'presence in absence'. This particular East Asian idea continually appears in its literature, music, art and dance.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the application of this 'presence in absence' concept to traditional Korean dance can be read as a shift from conventional dance language to a realm 'beyond visible movement'.



#### 2.4.5. Beyond visible movement.

For dance, *yin-chi* and *yang-chi* flows through and between performers and the audience. The body, in traditional Korean dance, movements are not understood as a series of discrete, separate gestures but, rather, the outward manifestation of the flow of *chi*.<sup>16</sup> The circulation of *chi* is evidence of liveliness and affects the birth, growth and death of all beings. It also affects beyond movement in traditional dance.

According to more conventional models of dance analysis, meaning is articulated primarily through movement. This methodology, however, has a limited use when examining traditional Korean dance such as shaman dance and *salp'uri ch'um* where the concern is not only with what lies behind and between movements but also the 'hidden' movement. This notion of the 'beyond' is a point of difference between classical ballet and traditional Korean dance. As Kim (2002: 44) explains,

Movement is recognised as the substance on the stage, i.e. the object of the dancer on stage as subject, and movement's most complete forms are analysed [by scholars] in order to identify its essence, which reflects the Western scientific spirit that independent observations must be made in order to recognize an object.

Following Kim's theory, the 'essence' of ballet comes from 'visible' movement, wherein all aspects of the movement, such as direction, level and length are notated. In comparison, the 'essence' of traditional Korean dance appears to come from an 'invisible' (i.e. ambiguous, less clearly discernable) depth of movement. In contrast to

what Kim suggests are 'scientific' western dance techniques, Korean dance is more emotive: the concern is less with perfection of execution but, rather, a more profound yet less quantifiable 'inner' expressive quality.

Kim's suggestion that there exists a clear qualitative difference between Western and Eastern dance is, however, problematic. Not only does it ignore generic and historical differences but it also fails to consider that dance is a live art form. As such, and as Stephanie Jordan (2000: 89) points out, '... dance, as a performing art involving interpretation, is elusive and slippery.' Just as not all ballet choreography is merely an exploration of the mechanics of movement for their own sake so not all Korean dance is the outward manifestation of 'invisible depth'. Indeed, as Chae suggests, 'audiences of traditional Korean dance think that the essential beauty of dance can ultimately be shown through the quantity or size of movement'. Although, and as both Jordan and Chae imply in their own theorems, Kim's notion of an East West divide is open to question, certain differences can be identified. For example, while western dance scholars have applied notation systems such as Labanotation as a useful tool in their interpretative strategies, Korean dance analysts have tended to focus upon the folkloric origins of such dances *Muemu* and *Ch'eoyong-mu* as a way of explaining 'invisible depth'.

As such, western dance methodologies, wherein the dominant strategy is the interpretation of what is visible, have limited value to this study. Likewise, models of analysis based on narrative origins provide little space in which to discuss specifics of movement. To this end, what is required is an interpretative framework that applies a



western movement-based analytical model to explorations of some of the less-discernible (invisible) qualities of traditional Korean dance.

For the past seventy years in South Korea, ballet and Graham style modern dance have enjoyed higher status than indigenous Korean dance forms. A possible reason for this situation is that, as a result of a Japanese colonial advocating of Western rationality, Korean traditions that couldn't be explained by this 'modern' discourse were judged merely as superstition, ignorance or myth. Even after the end of the Japanese rule, the American influence remained and continued to impose a cultural hierarchy. The pinnacle of this hierarchy in dance is ballet, not only due to its notated tradition but also because of a Western hegemony.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of this hegemony, and the discursive parameters through which it operates, the aesthetic value of 'invisible depth' unique to Korean traditional dance was widely overlooked. Instead, greater emphasis was given to explorations of the technical principles of dance composition that can be readily translated into linguistic codes. Because the notion of 'invisible depth' remains an elusive quality with no obviously discernible means of explanation or quantifiable characteristic, it has gradually disappeared from accounts of Korean dance practice and its theory. This has resulted in the omission of a key aspect of traditional Korean dance and its value as an indigenous aesthetic practice.

Both visible movement and its 'invisible depth' are complementary elements that, together, characterise the essence of traditional Korean dance. As such, for any

sympathetic analysis of traditional dance, it should not be necessary to choose between these two elements nor impose a hierarchy upon them. What is suggested, therefore, is a shift towards a more contextualist approach to reading dance: an analytical model that is sensitive not only to the specifics of socio-cultural background but that also allows for the interpretation of dance not as a series of individual and discrete movements but rather as a unified and 'invisibly' interconnected whole. Such a model, it will be argued, may provide a solution to hierarchical structures imposed by Eurocentric thinking and a means of re-reading the evolution of traditional Korean dance. Key to this methodology is an investigation into the relationship between the performers and the audience.

#### 2.4.6. The relationship between performers and audience.

The relationship between performers and audience in traditional Korean dance takes the form of a dialogue. The conduit through which this dialogue is conducted is the sharing of *chi* energy. For example, if the audience has *yang-chi* and the performer has *yin-chi*, the audience will give the *chi* to the dancer and vice-versa. As such, traditional dance forms such as shaman dance are often judged according to this 'sharing' of *chi*.

According to Seok-jae Lim (in Chae, 2000: 20) 'the audience is given various kinds of roles according to the context of the performance'. They actively participate in the whole process. Likewise, the performers are highly sensitive to the spectator's mood and modify their dancing accordingly. This open and responsive structure of traditional performance, wherein the audience can inspire improvisation, is a key characteristic of traditional Korean dance.

In shaman dance, for example, the performer/audience distinction is continually deconstructed through this interactive process. This *He-chae* (deconstruction) makes Korean dance more a social process rather than just a theatrical spectacle. By actively encouraging the participation of the spectator in choreographic decision-making, the 'fourth-wall' of the theatre space is challenged. Furthermore, dualistic notions of 'passive' spectator and 'active' performer, stage-space and auditorium, and objectivity and subjectivity are problematised. These elements, although not unique to traditional Korean dance, can be read as exerting a resistance on (imposed) western notions of dance performance practice. Moreover, this interactive relationship between performer and spectator is also shared between the dancers and the musicians.

#### 2.4.7. The relationship between dance and music.

Traditional Korean dance is nearly always performed to live musical accompaniment. Just as with the spectator, dancers and musicians share and transmit *chi* energy. This means that, unlike in western dance performance, loud and fast musical accompaniment is contrasted with quiet and slow movement. Together, however, this sense of opposition between music and movement creates balance. This *yin-yang* relationship results from what Seok-jae Lim (2000) describes as Korean disinterest in notions of parallelism or standardization in music and dance; equal energy of dance and music have rarely appeared simultaneously in Korean traditional dance.

Apart from this 'interactive' quality, there are two further characteristics that exemplify the relationship between the music and the dance in traditional Korean performance.



First of these is 'a pause in the beat': a stillness of movement against a fast rhythm in the music.

According to Chae (1985: 33), although 'a pause in the beat' suggests stillness, beneath this visible calm is an 'invisible chaos'. This quality is not unique to dance but, as a key principle of Korean philosophy, can be identified in other traditional art forms. In Asian paintings, for example, it corresponds to the blank space, or *Nonghyeon*, that fills the emptiness between *yang* (the positive) and *yin* (the negative).

For dance analysis, there is no direct western equivalent to this sense of 'stillness'. The nearest approximation is, elsewhere, identified by Jordan (2000: 88) as movement 'material that rides freely across the musical pulse'. Her interpretation has only limited value to this study, however, as it does not take into account the *yin-yang* balance of Korean performance practice. For example, in shaman dance, the receiving of the spirit by the dancer is symbolised by a moment of 'stillness' during which time the music is at its loudest and fastest.

Elsewhere, Chae (1985: 32) points out that, in Korean folk dance, a 'pause in the beat' comes from 'the wisdom of everyday life and free life-emotion'. In other words, it is the 'eye' of the hurricane or the 'drawing back' of the sea before a wave hits the shore. In dance terms, therefore, this 'stillness' can be interpreted as the 'invisible' transition from tension to release.

The second characteristic of the relationship between dance and music is *aht-park*. The nearest, western, equivalent is syncopation, which, according to Jordan (p.78) is 'the shifting of the metrical accent to accent a point that does not coincide with either a beat or strong beat.' In Korean traditional dance, however, the decision to 'shift the accent' is given to the dancer, and this lends a unique tension to the performance as no-one else knows when this *aht-park* will appear. This improvisatory element of traditional Korean dance can be read as a deconstruction of western performance values wherein, instead of the dancer merely following the dictate of the music, the Korean performer actively contributes to the rhythm.

According to Chae (1985: 34-35), '*aht-park*' corresponds to an exception that 'interrupts' the more confrontational aspect of the western hierarchy between music and movement. This notion of the 'exception to the rule' forms a normal part of Korean life. An example of this is, according to Lim (2000), is the subtlety of Korean humour. For example, and to provoke a 'warm smile', Koreans may decide to wear their *gak* (a Korean bamboo hat) at a slightly jaunty angle. Elsewhere, in social dance, Koreans may adopt a deliberately tilted or off-centred posture.

Another example of 'exceptionality', according to Chae (2000: 72), is also evident in the use of line in traditional architecture. Rather than following a symmetrical shape, the roofs of Korean houses tend to have one side more curved than the other. Elsewhere, Kyeol-yeol Yun (*Choom*, August 1995: 3-20) suggests that this 'warm line' is derived from the natural shape of 'mountains, rivers, and natural roads' in Korea. It is also, he observes, present in ceramics produced during the *Yi* dynasty. He adds that, the line in

Korean dance resembles the 'eaves of a tiled house' or 'the line of a Korean traditional costume or that of *berseon*' (Korean traditional sacks). At the end of the shaman dance, for example, the spectators' participation corresponds to this 'curving' form.

As with the notion of 'stillness', the exceptionality produced from *aht-park*, can be read as effecting a deconstruction of the dichotomous underpinnings of western critical discourse in that this seemingly organic shape corresponds neither to a line or a curve.

#### 2.4.8. Movement qualities in traditional Korean dance.

All the characteristics of traditional Korean dance, such as Communitarianism, magical realism, *he-bang* and *he-chae*, *yin-yang* and invisible depth contribute to its movement quality. Moreover, the various ways in which these characteristics interact can be understood as key to the ways in which the many different forms of Korean dance can not only be distinguished but also understood. In this section, how these characteristics are employed in methodologies of teaching and rehearsal will be examined.

Many of the movements and postures adopted in shaman dance are also found in many other traditional Korean dance forms. For example, one of the most distinguishing features of shaman dance is the use of a natural and relaxed standing posture that, according to Malborg Kim (2002), contrasts with the more artificial turned-out stance adopted in classical ballet. Moreover, as Kim adds, in shaman dance the spine is never straight but rather, is always bent or curved while, in classical ballet, it is stretched and erect. The tilted line of the shaman dancer's body also differs from a balletic symmetry.



Contrasts between shaman dance and ballet can also be found in the use of focus and range of movement. While, in shaman dance, the focus is inward and the emphasis is on small movements, in ballet, the focus is outward and the use of turnout facilitates greater extension. Unlike classical ballet, in shaman dance the knees remain bent. According to Kim (2002: 39), this 'softness' in the legs articulates one of the founding philosophical principles of shaman dance. She states that 'Korean dance accommodates the earth's gravity but considers movement space and the ground to be cooperative rather than conflicting elements, and seeks a harmonious relationship between the two through bilateral unity.'

In traditional Korean dance, the dynamic is not a struggle against gravity. Rather, through a specific use of the sole of the foot, a connection is made between the dancers' body and the ground. According to Kim, this use of the feet is key to the movement quality of Korean dance and, as such, forms an integral part of the training process.

Unlike in classical ballet, however, this attention to the use of the feet does not suggest a hierarchy between the upper and lower body. In Korean dance the rhythm of the steps have equal value to the movement of the arms, hands, torso and shoulders. By comparison, and according to Jordan (2000: 80), in ballet, 'steps, the transference of weight and the particularly articulate footwork of the style are of primary importance in establishing rhythm and relationship to music, with impulses in torso and limbs coinciding more or less with steps.'

In traditional Korean dance, the movement of the arms, shoulder and head not only

embellish the steps but also have their own rhythm. For example, the shoulders take on an almost liquid quality as they ripple right and left and up and down either together or separately. Although the shoulders seem to have their own unique movement lexicon in Korean dance, how they move affects the rest of the body and, as such, it is almost impossible to separate the choreography into a series of gestures. Rather, and as Kim suggests, the body should be read as a dynamic, moving whole.

Key to the undulating walking style adopted in Korean dance is the bending of the knees. This, as Van Zile (2001: 13) points out, emphasises the 'upward-downward' quality of performances. She goes on to suggest that a key movement feature is 'an emphasis on verticality'. More specifically, she explains,

In the slower forms, such as the court and Buddhist dances, the dancers regularly alternate between bending and extending their knees. Hence the whole body lifts and lowers. In the faster, more vigorous dances, such as the farmers' band dance and music and the masked dance dramas, the bending of the knees serves as a preparatory push that propels the body into a jump, enlarging the up and down actions.

Unlike in Classical ballet, however, the legs never straighten and the feet remain relaxed: neither pointed or flexed. Furthermore, the number of steps in Korean dance is not important. The walking pattern, made up of these small steps, constantly changes throughout the dance.

The jumping movements, that symbolise a meditative relationship between the earth and the sky, are two-footed in the case of possession shamans, while hereditary shamans

hop. These simple jumps, that are nearly always on the spot, become higher and more energetic as the shaman reaches an ecstatic state. Turning movements are also used.

Unlike ballet, these turns are usually repeated on the same spot rather than moving through space. Similar to the jumps, the turning gradually becomes faster and more intense, at which point the performers often tilt their bodies to one side.

When the dancer lifts a leg it is never higher than thirty degrees. In contrast, the range of arm movements, often emphasised through the use of long sleeves, a fan or a sword, is wide and lyrical. The arms gently alternate between being wrapped around the body and spread wide. Occasionally the arms pause in front of the chest before moving out to the side and then above the head. Similarly, the dancer may make a circular gesture over the head before extending their arms outwards. Throughout the performance the arms are always in motion yet convey a sense of calmness. This notion of a calm yet never-ending movement quality, called *jeong-jung-dong* ('motion in stillness'), constitutes a key element to traditional Korean dance.

To suggest stillness through constant and delicate movement requires a high level of concentration by the dancer. *Jeong-jung-dong* can be understood as a process of deconstruction wherein, by removing all unnecessary movement, what is left is the essence of the dance. This sense of minimalism is encapsulated in a phrase often used by traditional Korean dance practitioners, in that 'merely raising a hand could be dance.' According to Chae (1985: 30), the rhythmic quality of *jeong-jung-dong* is based not upon technical skill or athleticism but, rather, invisible depth. As such, he adds,



old people's dance, being fully ripe, achieves this. The young dancer's excellent movement cannot. .... Korean dance is not enjoyed by the sensing eye; it is enjoyed by the spiritual eye which can see its essence. For this reason, needless to say, performers and audiences cannot enjoy Korean dance without reaching its spiritual depth.

The 'spiritual depth' expressed through *jeong-jung-dong*, as described by Chae, is elsewhere observed by Kim (2002: 46). She argues that, in traditional practice, 'dance not only becomes a measure of artistic skill, but also of spirit and style, and artistic and human inclinations'. In this respect, Chae's notion of 'spirituality', wherein there is no separation between the spirit and the body, is the same as Kim's understanding of tolerant 'human behaviour' as a moderation between 'inner' feelings and 'outward' gesture. *Jeong-jung-dong* appears in almost every traditional Korean dance, including *Salpuri*, monk's dance, shaman dance, *byeongsin-ch'um* and Korean mask dance. In traditional Korean dance, emphasis is given to improvisation, variation and individuality. As such, no two performances are the same. Moreover, this philosophy, according to Chae (1985: 38), is not unique to dance:

the aesthetic moral nature of Koreans does not place high value on exact replication in dance (or in writing, painting, or other art forms). Even when someone makes pottery, s/he has appreciated the beauty when s/he can make different shapes of pottery. Repetition is not interesting to the Korean aesthetic nature.

(translation)

According to Ja-yong Cho (in Chae, 2000: 31), it is the combination of joy (*hŭng*) and grief (*han*) that forms the basis of variation in Korean dance. Ultimately, he adds, it is

up to the dancer to choose what movement to execute and, through this, express a sense of individuality otherwise unacceptable in everyday life.

Elsewhere, Kim (2002: 48) observes that, in traditional Korean dance, the personal style of each dancer is more important than the execution of pre-choreographed movement.

This individuality of expression, she contends, is a key aspect of all Important Intangible Cultural Properties in South Korea. This contrasts with ballet and its emphasis on the precise execution of a set movement code.

Many traditional Korean dances such as shaman, mask and *salp'uri* are open to change during performance. In this respect the division between dancer and choreographer is deconstructed. This impetus to improvise, Chae (2000) suggests, is encouraged by the live musical accompaniment. In contrast, the use of pre-recorded music can lead to a level of 'stagnation' in the performance. Without the eye contact between dancer and musician, there can be no sharing of *chi* energy.

## 2.5. Conclusion.

This discussion of the evolution of traditional Korean dance began with an exploration of its oldest, and hence most influential form, shaman dance. Using shaman dance as an example, the concern was with the relationship between founding philosophy and key performance characteristics such as communitarianism, magical realism, *he-bang* and *he-chae*, *chi* and *yin-yang*, and beyond visible movement. Drawing evidence from other traditional Korean dance forms, aspects such as the relationship between performers and

audience, the relationship between dance and music, and the particular quality of movement in traditional Korean dance was also discussed.

This investigation into traditional forms took, as its underlying strategy, the historical foundation that, it will be proposed, will support the pursuit of a theory and practice of Korean dance that can overcome many of the problems associated with a Eurocentric legacy. The characteristics of traditional Korean dance explored in this chapter, it will subsequently be argued, provide the key to understanding contemporary dance practice in South Korea. As such, the next chapter will present an examination of how these traditional characteristics are used by post-colonial practitioners of Korean National Dance as a means for challenging Eurocentrism.



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<sup>1</sup> For more detail on the Intangible Cultural Asset system, see Howard (1998: 168).

<sup>2</sup> The Department of Cultural Properties of the Cultural Properties Administration (<http://www.ocp.go.kr/>) describes how there are 119 Intangible Cultural Properties and 194 *Ingan Munwhajea* (Human Cultural Properties) in Korea.

<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, Judy Van Zile (in Howard, 1998: 173) observes that 'dancers and dance teachers consistently point out that *Salp'uri* has its roots in shamanism'.

<sup>4</sup> *Ssikkim Kut* is the 72<sup>nd</sup> Important Intangible Cultural Property.

<sup>5</sup> *Ch'eoyong-mu* is the 39<sup>th</sup>, *Taepyeong-mu* is the 92<sup>nd</sup> and *salp'uri-ch'um* is the 97<sup>th</sup> Important Intangible Cultural Property.

<sup>6</sup> Both in *The Korean Journal of Dance Studies* (Spring 2002).

<sup>7</sup> *Bongsan* mask dance is the 72<sup>nd</sup> Important Intangible Cultural Property.

<sup>8</sup> *Kangkansuwolae* is the 8<sup>th</sup> Important Intangible Cultural Property.

<sup>9</sup> *Nongak* is the 11<sup>th</sup> Important Intangible Cultural Property.

<sup>10</sup> Karen L. Scheel's article, *Chi Energy* in <http://www.healing-systems.com/chi.html>

<sup>11</sup> Karen L. Scheel's article, *Chi Energy* in <http://www.healing-systems.com/chi.html>

<sup>12</sup> 'Chi applies to the human body in two ways; inherited *Chi* and acquired *Chi*. Inherited *Chi* is the energy we receive from our parents at the time of conception' (<http://www.healing-systems.com/chi.html>)

<sup>13</sup> see <http://www.healing-systems.com/chi.html>

<sup>14</sup> Karen L. Scheel's article, *Chi Energy* in <http://www.healing-systems.com/chi.html>

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/CHPHIL/YINYANG.HTM>

<sup>16</sup> The path of the *chi* and blood in the human body is called *Kyeong-rak* and is linked to the 'five viscera' and to the 'six entrails' inside of the body and at the end of the foot and the hand outside of body. The function of *kyeong-rak* is to make connect inside and outside, through *chi* of body, and to initiate the physiological action of each tissue and vital organ of the body. The human body as a miniature universe houses 12 energetic channels or pathways wherein *chi* flows. These channels are known as 'meridians' and control both our gross and subtle anatomy. Our gross anatomy is the form that we can see whereas most individuals cannot see our subtle anatomy. This subtle energetic body represents the whole of who we are -- our body, mind, emotions, and spirit. Unlike the veins that our blood flows through meridian pathways also travel throughout the entire body but rather than fluid they deal more with energy and states of consciousness. Each meridian is associated with one of the Five Elements and connects to a *Yin* or *Yang* organ of the body linking our states of consciousness.

<sup>17</sup> Gramsci (1972) argues that 'Europe culture has always had a hegemony over other cultures in the world; ....currently this involves a transition from Hegelianism to the philosophy of praxis; .... once this European culture was a preserve of the professional intellectuals, but .... now it is spreading to or affecting mass culture'.

## **Chapter Three.**

**The development of National Dance as a post-colonial practice.**

### 3.1. Introduction.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the activities of the advocates of National Dance (*Minjok Ch'um*) since its inception in the early 1980s. In particular, the concern will be with how National Dance contributed to a post-colonial and pro-Nationalist reaction to an imperialist legacy. The previous chapter presented an examination of the various forms of traditional Korean dance and how they could be interpreted as part of a strategy for overcoming Eurocentrism. As such, how one of these forms, mask-dance, as an anti-establishment practice, contributed to the formation of National Dance will therefore be discussed. Key to this investigation is to what extent the traditionalist principles of a predominantly amateur indigenous dance culture were adopted by National Dance professionals and influenced performance practice. As evidence of this evolutionary process, an early National Dance work by Ae-ju Lee will be examined.

During the 1970s Ae-ju Lee started to develop a performance style that used traditional Korean dance forms in order to address contemporary Korean social concerns. It was not until 1983, however, that she formed her own company Ch'um Pae *Shin*. The first work, *Nanum-kuk*, was an exploration of the gradual destruction of the natural Korean ecology due to industrialisation. It was premiered in 1984 at the National Fringe Theatre. Her next dance piece, *Barammaji* ('*Meeting Strong Wind*') was first performed at Seoul National University in February 1987 as part of a student demonstration against the brutal torture and murder of a university student by an intelligence-agent.



The main reason for examining this work in detail is because, to date, very little academic writing on the development, philosophy and performance practices of National Dance has been published either in South Korea or elsewhere. A reason for this critical vacuum could be due to a predominantly conservative attitude amongst Korean dance scholars wherein National Dance was regarded as a low art form and hence undeserving of serious critical attention. Furthermore, the anti-authoritarianism of much National Dance was, particularly during the 1980s, considered too dangerous a subject to discuss in a climate where any suggestion of political discontent was punishable by imprisonment. As such, National Dance remained an 'underground' movement both feared and ignored by the more mainstream branches of the academy.

Likewise, the impact of Eurocentrism on Korean dance has also received little attention in academic circles. Two key texts by Chae (1984, 2000), however, explore the indigenous characteristics and social function of traditional Korean folk and mask dance. Chae's investigations do not include theatre dance practice, unlike those pursued by Chae-hyeon Kim (1989). Key to Kim's theoretic is that dance, regardless of the intentions of the practitioner, has an identifiable political agency. As such, he suggests, creativity cannot exist apart from its relative socio-cultural background. He uses this philosophy as the basis for the many reviews of Korean dance works performed between 1986 and 1988. As such, of concern will be to what extent both Chae and Kim's findings can contribute to an understanding of National Dance practice during the 1980s and 90s.

The beginning of the 1990s in Korea were marked by the establishment of a democratic government and the formation of a 'new social order'. As such, to what extent this political change impacted upon the performance strategies of National Dance will be examined in the latter part of this chapter. In particular, of concern will be how greater freedom of artistic expression affected National Dance's pro-Korean/anti-Western ideology and its relationship to non-indigenous dance forms.

### 3.2. The concept of 'Nationalism'.

The historians Carlton J. Hayes (1926), P. Gooc (1931) and Hans Kohn (1961) share a similar belief as to the 'modern' origins of nationalism. According to Hayes (1926: 29) nationalism is a 'very modern phenomenon'. Elsewhere, Gooc (1931: 217) points out that 'nationalism is a product of the French revolution'. Moreover, Kohn (1961) adds that nationalism also appeared in many other non-European countries during the eighteenth century.

According to both Kohn (1961) and Tom Narin (1977), a nation is a country whose people are sovereign. Furthermore, a nation is distinct from a pre-modern country based on blood ties or ethnicity. In contrast to an understanding of 'nation' as a form of primitive tribalism, the basis of a nation in modern society is the power of ideology. Thus, a nation is a social product of historical development. As Kohn (1961) points out, only in modern times did people start to recognise the nation as a centre of political and

cultural life. Moreover, and as Narin (1977: 325) elsewhere argues, 'obviously a nation is not an absolute being'. In this respect, a nation is no longer viewed as an absolute being, transcendental object or the 'well-spring' of all kinds of political and cultural life. Rather, and following Narin, a nation is the product of an existing power at a certain point of history. Therefore a nation is an ever-changing, never fixed and very complex organisation.

The concept of a 'fixed nation' can, in the modern age, be a source of extreme problems. Narin (1977: 325) claims that 'nationalism corresponds to inner requirements and individual necessity in a society and nationalism gives the groups and individuals an identity'. Elsewhere, Peter Alter (1989: 8) argues,

Nationalism is hence taken to be a largely dynamic principle capable of engendering hopes, emotions and action; it is a vehicle for activating human beings and creating political solidarity amongst them for the purpose of achieving a common goal.

Elie Kedourie (1993) suggests that nationalism can be defined as 'an ideology', which he contrasts with the older constitutional politics of pre-national Europe. He argues that nationalism resulted as a response to 'the predicament of modern man' that he understands as a variety of ideologies that caused widespread alienation and served to divide societies. He also argues that nationalism's greatest achievement has been to uphold national self-determination as the organising principle of the international order.



Elsewhere, Kohn (1961: 10) writes that 'Nationalism is first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness, which since the French Revolution has been more and more common to mankind'. Narin (1977) not only seems to share this opinion but also sees it as both politically and morally beneficial to modern society. This positive view of nationalism is not, however, universally accepted. Many historians have drawn attention to its negative impact in First World culture. While nationalism lends a sense of communal identity to members of a nation it can also induce apathy, suspicion and hatred towards outsiders. Extreme example of this is include fascism, either in the form of Japanese militarism or Germany's Nazism.

In the Third World, however, nationalism is an anti-imperialistic force that seeks to protect Third World people and their nations. Nationalism, in this situation, takes on an emancipatory function: a curative response to a colonial legacy and an agent of indigenous cultural restoration. Franz Fanon (1967: 188) exemplifies this understanding of nationalism when he states:

A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever present reality of the people. A nation culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.

As such, any discussion of nationalism should incorporate notions of transculturalism and intraculturalism. According to Patrice Pavis (1996: 6), the 'transcultural, indeed, transcends particular cultures [of nations] on behalf of a universality of the human condition'. In other words, to understand the characteristics of a national culture is to transcend nation limits and, instead, seek to create a multi-cultural post-colonial practice. Brook (1993) also suggests that transculturalism makes it possible to communicate directly without making any hierarchical distinctions on the basis of race, culture or class.

In contrast to the outward perspective of transculturalism, intraculturalism explains the internalised processes of a nation. For example, Patrice Pavis (1996) points out that post-colonial third-world artists often place a great deal of emphasis upon rediscovering the traditional indigenous roots of contemporary cultural practices.<sup>1</sup> Pavis (1996: 6) remarks that 'the intracultural allows the study of a tradition in its particularity in order to leave subsequently its isolation and move towards a homogenisation of theatrical cultures – towards a transculturalism.' To emphasise the indigenous characteristics of national culture, in this way, does not, however, express an ultranationalism or ultraculturalism that advocates the purity of a culture or nation.

In Korea, according to ethno-musicologist Keith Howard (1999: 16), 'national identity grew out of the struggle against Japanese imperialism in the colonial period'. After liberation, nationalism in Korea is reflected in the struggle for reunification between the

North and the South. It also, during the post-liberation period of authoritarianism, encouraged the struggle for democracy. Moreover, nationalism provides an important positive cultural identity to Koreans who have suffered the brutality of the 1950-53 war. As Howard (1999: 120) explains, '...nationalism has allowed Koreans to develop pride in who they are, and this, surely, has been fundamental to the building of the modern state which thrives today'.

The 1980s saw a sudden build-up in anti-imperialist feeling and a growing resentment of the authoritarian government in Korea. Artists from many different disciplines articulated this struggle in terms of a restoration of indigenous cultural practice. For example, poets such as Ji-ha Kim, No-hae Park and Nam-ju Kim all wrote extensively about a widespread dissatisfaction with the prevailing national situation and were subsequently sent to jail by the authoritarian government. The artist, Seong-dam Hong was also imprisoned for more than four years because he drew pictures that were used at reunification assemblies and exhibited at anti-authoritarian demonstrations. The greatest penalty was, however, experienced by mask dance movement activists, who because they censured the authoritarian government in their performance, were sent to jail in large numbers.<sup>2</sup> As Korean scholar Duyul Song points out (2000: 210), 'the national culture appeared as a result of the struggle against the authoritarian government'.<sup>3</sup> Mask dance, as one of the most highly visible forms of this counterculture, not only contributed to the spread of political dissension in Korea during the early 1980s, but due to its ability to blend traditional elements with a more contemporary 'agit-propaganda'



sensibility, played an important part in the development of National Dance. Moreover, this influence involved, not only a Nationalist philosophy, but also embraced aspects of performance practice.

### 3.3. The impact of the 'Mask Dance Movement' on National Dance.

The mask dance movement that students began to promote in universities in South Korea in the 1970s had a great effect on the emergence of National Dance. In particular, the National Dance movement was inspired by the practices of the 'Grand Theatre (*Minjok kuk*)'<sup>4</sup> form that was mostly practised by members an amateur mask dance groups at universities.<sup>5</sup>

Mask dance originated in communal festivals but is now also performed in theatres.<sup>6</sup> Although there are regional differences, the main purpose was (and still is) to satirise the corruption of aristocrats (*yangban*) and Buddhist priests who were symbols of a feudal authority. The central narrative, told through a series of songs, speeches and dances, concerns how an old man loses his children and parts with his wife due to warfare or a flood. Even though it deals with social hardship, however, the mood of the performance is predominantly humorous. This emphasis on comedy can be read as a means of breaking down the barrier between performer and audience. Likewise, and unlike Western dance practitioners who are frequently tall and athletic in appearance due to years of specialised training, Mask dance performers tend to resemble ordinary

Korean people. Moreover, mask dance choreography is based on everyday movement and avoids displays of virtuosity. Furthermore, after the performance, the members of the audience are invited to participate in the celebratory dancing and singing. Mask dance, and its emphasis upon a sense of National Communitarianism through satire, was, during the latter part of the twentieth century, to become an important tool within a countercultural resistance to the overwhelming process of Westernisation under the auspices of authoritarianism.

In the 1970s, Western commercial culture flowed into South Korea through the process of a USA-based form of industrialisation. The Park government, that took control of South Korea in a military coup in 1961, engineered this industrial development. Many university students and intellectuals who feared the loss of their own culture, were highly critical of this blind adoption of Western cultural ideology. This led to a period of civil unrest wherein progressive intellectuals took part in mass demonstrations and led an anti-government propaganda. One of these propagandist vehicles, through which university students could articulate a Korean 'self-esteem' and participate in the struggle against incoming Western culture, was mask dance (Chae, 1985).

At the beginning of the 1970s, university students began to organise mask dance clubs. They performed mask-dances in the open grounds of the campus, often drawing crowds of up to 10,000 students. According to Chae (1985: 157), during the 1970s, the students saw the mask dance movement as 'a kind of counter-cultural movement against

Western commercial cultures and the ideology of the existing South Korea army dictatorship'. This view is clearly articulated in the rhetoric of University mask-dance pamphlets. For example, to accompany their 1974 performance of *Kasan Okwangdae*, the folk-culture club of Seogang University claimed that 'in so far as vicious music taints our ears and eyes, and various western evils cast a spell on our spirit, our ground of mask-dance will be a spree as a struggle to secure our lives' (translation).

At the same time, the mask-dance club of Seoul National University described what they saw as a clear link between tradition and politics:

We always question how our mask-dance could contribute to raising contemporary social and cultural problems, thinking how the mask-dance socially functioned and expressed people's aesthetic consciousness in those days. The question would be solved by constantly presenting the common problems of our society.

(Programme note for the mask-dance club of the Seoul National University, 1974, translation)

As part of their performance of *Bongsan Mask-dance* on May 1979, the mask-dance club of Seoul National University drew attention to foreign intervention in Korean culture,



We should heal the diseases that have made us lose our own special aroma and adopt foreign culture indiscreetly. To do this, we must regain the playfulness that existed inherently in our rhythm. We cannot cure the diseases without an effort to know ourselves and have self-confidence.

(translation)

During the 1970s, two schools of thought concerning the political agency of mask dance developed. Chae (1985: 160) points to a difference of opinion concerning the question of 'how to establish a modern national culture based on the traditional national forms combined with the contents of contemporary people's lives'. Some intellectuals argued that traditional folk practices such as the mask-dance should be 'given back' to the working people as its rightful owners. The folk-culture club of Seogang University who attempted to restore to *Kasan* village in the Kyeongsang County a mask-dance that hadn't been performed for over twenty years adopted this policy. They describe how they,

face a more fundamental problem. That is, a question of whether we can find a spiritual basis to restore *Kasan Okwangdae* to the *Kasan* villagers. We could, however, discover this spiritual basis in the villagers' enthusiasm when the *okwangdae* (mask-dance) was re-enacted after a lapse of 20 years. The problem that we have again is how far the restored mask-dance can reflect their changed lives. Our job will be complete only when the restored dance contains their experience and hope in their present lives.

(Programme note for the Folk-culture club of the Seogang University, 1974, translation)

This 'resurrection' policy expanded throughout the 1970s with practitioners taking employment in factories and farms in order to create workers unions and teach dance.

Other university students experimented with establishing a nationalised theatre arts practice in the universities. These students were the basis of what was later called the professional 'Grand Theatre' form, so called because they performed in the university grounds, open factory yards and village squares. For example, to accompany the first performance of *Yurang Kukdan* ('*Travelling Troupe*'), the drama club of the Ewha Women's University claimed,

The university dramas should take a critical look at the social situation surrounding us.....We should not lose our own character and direction by wandering deep into Western avant-garde dramas or the works of other nationalities. We should contribute to the creation of subjective dramas in South Korea, through an experimental work of folk-drama based on mask-dance, traditional puppet shows and *pansori* (long epic song). The re-creation of folk-drama is the very task of our drama society, which should be attempted in the universities.  
(The drama club of the Ewha Women's University, 1977, translation)<sup>7</sup>

Many students who, upon graduation, formed their own professional drama groups adopted this philosophy. One of these, *Yeonu Mudae*, in the programme notes to their 1980 performance of *Jangsangot Mae*, claim,

The problem is how we reproduce the common legend of traditional mask-dance either in drama or in other genres..... At first we should take the social function and expressiveness of the mask-dance. Secondly, drama and mask-dance in our time should be an attack on people's common enemies and the victorious experience for communal lives. Drama that reveals the points well can be approved as a desirable succession from what the mask-dances have.

(translation)

According to *Yeonu Mudae*, both Grand Theatre and Mask dance share the same principles. Furthermore, this fusion of tradition and social function has exerted a telling influence on the conception of dance in post-colonial South Korea. One of the strongest advocates of a modern national dance form that could combine the past and the present, is Ae-ju Lee. In the accompanying notes to her 1974 performance of *Ttang-kuk* ('*Kuk of the Land*') she asks,

How is our dance going on? Our dance has been ruined by negligence and thoughtlessness, and isolated from the mass, being restricted to an exclusive possession of the minority. For this reason, it is a matter of course to say that dance has been the most apathetic of our arts. .... This performance will express people's life underlying in the divided Korean peninsula with our critical awareness, reviving the prototype of traditional dance as much as we can.

(translation)

Although Lee's 1974 performance is a Grand Theatre work, there is very little speech and song. Rather, *Ttang-kuk*, is a dance piece and as such, is considered by Korean scholars as an early example of what would later be classified as National Dance. Like



mask dance and Grand Theatre, National Dance was motivated by a strong political concern with the social welfare of the Korean populace. As another mouthpiece of the Korean counterculture during the 1980s, National Dance focused on their part in the ongoing struggle against the authoritarian government.

So, while mask dance can be viewed both as an agent of social reform and also the expression of a 'lost' national identity, 'Grand Theatre' might best be described as a total theatre of transformative consciousness in which the audience is witness to South Korea's democratisation. Both mask dance and 'Grand Theatre' were used as part of the call for the revolutionary overthrow of an entrenched authoritarianism. As forms of national propaganda, both mask dance and Grand Theatre helped move Korean politics towards socio-political change by shaping public opinion.

Not only did National Dance develop out of this acute sense of political awareness demonstrated by mask dance and Grand Theatre, but it also adopted many of their indigenous concerns. For example, like mask dance, National Dance advocated a strong improvisatory dynamic alongside the incorporation of both traditional and everyday movements and gestures. This emphasis on fostering a sense of national identity functioned to resist what was believed to be a Eurocentrism that was pervading all areas of Korean art and culture. Like mask dance, National Dance was motivated by social concerns, in that art should occupy a central position within Korean culture. As such, the belief was that all artists should not be separate from society but work in factories,

farms and villages and, as such, encourage a 'grass-roots' following. The notion of the 'professional' artist was, to this end, replaced with the idea of an 'arts for all' policy. Key to this philosophy was the promotion of a 'collective consciousness', wherein the art form, be it mask dance or National Dance, becomes the expressive forum for the South Korean people's struggle against the 'last regime' of the authoritarian government.

#### 3.4. The rise of National Dance as a post-colonial practice.

The original organisers of National Dance criticised the way in which Western dance forms were rated as superior to indigenous forms by South Korean dance scholars and audiences alike (Cho, 1991).<sup>8</sup> For example, dance practitioners Hae-suk Kang and Ae-ju Lee share the belief that South Korean dance should use Korean body imagery and movement vocabulary in order to express Korean concerns. To this end National Dance attempted to deconstruct what they saw as a Eurocentric pervasion of South Korean dance and restore indigenous characteristics. This post-colonial practice, according to Patrice Pavis (1996: 9), 'takes up elements of the home culture (that of ex- or neo-colonisation) and employs them from its indigenous perspective, thereby giving rise to a mixture of language, dramaturgies and performance processes.'

In order to establish a practice based on 'the home culture', many members of National Dance eschewed the Western canon while at the same time attempted to mix eastern and western 'performance processes'. Others, however, took a more ultranational stance and believed that the only means of overcoming Eurocentrism (and, therefore, the last vestiges of colonial rule) could be through the complete denial of all non-Korean elements. Therefore, while all the members of National Dance are united behind an anti-Eurocentric philosophy, not all share the same strategy.

In order to restore national or ethnic properties lost in the process of colonialism and modernisation, National Dance originally looked to traditional Korean dances for creative inspiration. This is because, as Chae-hyeon Kim (1987: 49) points out, the aesthetic principles of traditional dance are 'transmitted from generation to generation' and are therefore a preserve of pre-modern Korean culture. Moreover, by pursuing this policy, a modern 'one-world culture' ideology that ignores ethno-geographical differences is avoided. Rather, the emphasis is upon the exploration of more localised practices. To this end, National Dance looked to folk dance as an expression of a Korean identity that they believed was missing from more modern dance forms. As Hee-wan Chae (1985: 122) argues, 'folk dances are closely attached to people's lives because they are created and transmitted in the people's communitarian life'.

During the 1980s, National Dance formed a part of the larger National movement against both the authoritarian government and an American-led monocultural ideology.



As such, National Dance's original advocates believed that Korean dance had to contribute to the formation of a democratic society in South Korea. For example, dance companies such *Kang, Hae-suk Ch'um Pae, Bulim* and *Didim* frequently performed in the street as part of anti-authoritarian demonstrations throughout the 1980s. Several of these early street-based works will be examined next including perhaps one of the most influential Ae-ju Lee's *Barammaji* (1987). Like other founder members of National Dance, Lee was primarily concerned with the continuing dominance of Western dance forms and claimed that South Korean dance should represent more national concerns. By drawing upon an indigenous movement vocabulary, her aim was to explore Korean aesthetic principles and, as a result, deconstruct Eurocentrism.

### 3.5. Pre-democratic National Dance.

To emphasise what they saw as the immanent social function of dance, early members of National Dance most often performed at political assemblies and demonstrations. The main subject-matter of the works included the partition between North and South Korea, all forms of political oppression and the life and rights of the working class. Moreover, and to uphold a sense of nationalism, most of the choreographic material was derived from folk-dances. By exploring the movement vocabularies of mask and shaman dance, for example, they were able to draw upon a non-western sense of body imagery. Likewise, and in keeping with the communitarian character of folk dance, they often performed on the grounds of universities and factories. In addition, the proponents

of National Dance tried to break the ideological boundaries between ballet, modern dance and *han'guk muyong* (Korean Dance), believing that such exclusivity suppressed creativity. Instead, they attempted to combine various dance codes together into a more unified, yet still national, dance form. That post-colonial Korean dance practice should both resist Westernisation and also pursue a direct social agenda is a belief expressed in most of the National Dance literature. For example, Hae-suk Kang claims,

Unlike other arts, in dance it is easy to fall into narcissist and abstractive expression, neglecting concrete realities. This tendency is stronger in our country, because Western culture has flowed into this country in the process of the colonial domination.

Hae-suk Kang, March, 1989 (translation)

Hae-suk Kang was one of the earliest members of National Dance who founded her own company *Kang, Hae-suk Ch'um Pae* with her students at Chung-ju University in 1982. Their first work, *A Story of Five Episodes - the world seen through* dance was premiered as part of a street demonstration before being transferred to the National Fringe Theatre in 1982. This process was then repeated for *The Sad Story of Daughters* that, following its contribution to political rallies moved to the Grand Hall of Arts in 1983. Both performances deal with the impact of imports upon the indigenous rural community and how farmers' daughters, having migrated to the cities in order to find work, eventually become prostitutes. Kang's company also performed *Happiness is not a Good Academic Record* at an assembly of National Teachers Union in 1987.<sup>9</sup> This

work, a satire upon the over-competitive nature of children's education, was performed across the country about 90 times in two years; a clear reflection of the widespread level of concern with this subject. Another work, *Unification Dance*, deals with another major concern: the partition of the Korean peninsula. This work was performed ten times at large-scale university assemblies in 1988 and 1989.

Another dance company, *Ch'um Pae Bulim*, was organised in 1985 by young dancers who graduated from Ewha Women's University. One of the main concerns of this group is the trisection of dance in South Korea. To this end, ballet, Korean Dance and contemporary dance practitioners are brought together to form the group. Their main concern was the development of class division due to capitalism and, as such, used their work to support the labour struggle. Their first work, *Flaming* was premiered at the Shinsun Theatre in 1986 and, as with subsequent works, deals with working class issues. *For My Country, For My Dance* was their next work and was first performed at the Theatre Mirine in 1987. This work is a large-scale graphic depiction of the 1980 Kwangju Massacre.<sup>10</sup>

Subsequent works, however, were more small-scale and concerned the rights of labourers and factory workers. One of these, *The March*, describes the general strike of Hyundai shipbuilding workers. It was first performed in 1989 as part of a memorial service for the martyr Tae-il Jeon.<sup>11</sup>



The National Dance company (*Minjok Ch'um Pae*) *Didim* was, like *Bulim*, also founded by some young dancers in 1987. Unlike *Bulim*, however, they believed that the main cause of problems in Korea was not class-based but due to an ongoing American influence on national affairs. Believing that Korean people should take responsibility for the development of their own society and political ethos they embraced such diverse themes as feminism, National defence and reclaiming history. For example, their first work, *Flaming this Darkness* (1987) deals with female workers' rights. Their second work, *Korea! My love*, first performed at the Hanmadang Art Theatre in 1989, is an attack on the development of nuclear weaponry while *Nagani Dance* (1990) describes the Korean ancestors' struggle for liberation from Japanese occupation. Key to this attention to national concerns is a rejection of what *Didim*, like *Bulim*, regards as western abstraction. To this end;

Many South Korean dances have only pursued abstract beauty. They thus became the hands and legs of Western culture as high-class art, while our nation has been in colonialism and national partition. We reject such dances. Dance should be a logical and scientific activity. So, we confirm dance should be made and performed in the concrete.  
Minjok Ch'um Pae *Didim*, 1987 (translation).

The writings of companies such as *Bulim* and *Didim* share a criticism with the tendency of recent theatre dances to simply imitate the 'abstractive expression' of Western modernism. They recognise this unquestioning adoption of Western dance forms as a reflection of colonialism.

Furthermore, as Hae-suk Kang asserts, 'we should recover the unique characters of our dance. Only when we uphold the tradition of national culture, can we create National Dance that undertakes the tasks of art in our time (Programme note, May 1989: translation).

Dance, Kang believes, should establish national forms based on traditional culture. To this end, advocates of National Dance took upon themselves the task of creating new national forms derived from traditional dances and, as such, challenge Eurocentrism. Moreover, Hae-suk Kang, in the programme notes to her work *Happiness is not a good academic record* (1987) states that:

The social functions of dance can be recovered when a historical view or zeitgeist is given to common concerns among people. As a shaman exorcises common evils and activates people with energy, getting joined together with people in a exorcist performance, and hence as the exorcist performance usually changes into a mood of dance, we should learn from the people and share common sense with them.  
(translation)

This notion of 'exorcising' Eurocentrism from Korean dance practice is a conviction held by Kang throughout most of her performing career. In the notes to a later performance of the same work, she claims,

National Dance can attain a communitarian consciousness of national culture only when it is dissolved into the people's lives. National Dance should be created in relation to the people's life, in order not to become isolated.

Hae-suk Kang, 1988 (translation)

Kang suggests that dance should borrow from traditional folk culture a social function. Elsewhere, and according to folklorists Dong-il Cho (1975) and Hee-wan Chae (1985), traditional folk-dance has a communitarian consciousness in that they both respond to, and provide an antidote to, suffering as well as address problems such as natural disasters, warfare, inequality, discrimination and social injustice. The members of National Dance adopted this curative function and used performance as a way of dealing with political and social matters such as democratic rights, National reunification, worker's and women's rights and the environment. The concern in the next section of this chapter is how this range of ideological concerns were put into practice.

Unlike *Shin* and *Kang*, *Hae-Suk* and their almost exclusive attention to traditional Korean dance forms, *Bulim* and *Didim* were more concerned with breaking down the barriers between indigenous and western dance styles. Their belief was that this division was suppressing creativity. To this end, both *Bulim* and *Didim* attempted to combine both western and eastern techniques in order to address contemporary Korean concerns. This led to the development of a more 'open', socially sensitive and ultimately more influential performance practice that reached its creative peak during the 1990s.



As suggested by the reactionary treatment of subject-matter in dance works performed by companies such as *Kang Hae-suk Ch'um Pae*, *Bulim* and *Didim* the main tenet of national Dance during its early stages was 'agit-propaganda'. Moreover, dissatisfied with the existing predominance of Western dance forms such as ballet, Graham and contemporary dance and their 'modern abstract expression', the concern was with mining indigenous sources in order to directly address specifically Korean matters. Eurocentrism is therefore challenged on two fronts; generically and thematically. This fusion of form and content is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by one of the most influential early National Dance works, Ae-ju Lee's *Barammaji* (1987).<sup>12</sup>

### 3.5.1 The context of Ae-ju Lee's *Barammaji* (1987).

Ae-ju Lee's *Barammaji* can be understood in the following political context. In the 1980s, the Chun military government suppressed the student and citizen movements that struggled against the authoritarian rule. Many students and citizens who denounced the illegitimacy of the Chun government and demanded a democratic government were arrested, detained or imprisoned by the police and secret intelligence agents. Not only were they denied access to lawyers or family but many were subsequently brutally tortured and killed. Amongst these victims was a student of the Seoul National University called Chong-cheol Park who was murdered by an agent of the Korean

Central Intelligence Agency in February 1987. This event brought about massive anger amongst the public and eventually led to the wave of strikes in June 1987.

Soon after this shocking event, a professor at the University called Ae-ju Lee performed a dance to mourn this student's death and to protest against the case. Her performance, that stoked the fires of public resentment, made the front page of all the newspapers.

Shortly after this initial performance, and in the midst of the subsequent wave of strikes in June 1987, another equally shocking event took place. A student of the Yeonse University, Han-yeol Lee, was killed by pepper gas used by the riot police. Nearly one million people who gathered at his funeral at the Yeonse University, demanded an end to the arbitrary power of the authoritarian government and the immediate establishment of democratic rule. Ae-ju Lee repeated her previous performance at the funeral.

As a professor at Seoul National University her participation in student gatherings would have been considered by her peers as tantamount to professional suicide. Her actions also made it on to the front page of most of the National press, some of them going so far as to accuse her of instigating subsequent waves of demonstrations throughout the rest of the year (Donga newspaper, 11 June 1987). This relationship between performance and political struggle was to remain central to National Dance for the remainder of the decade.

### 3.5.2. The structure of *Barammaji*.

There are four separate sections in *Barammaji*: 'Seed Dance', 'Water Dance', 'Fire Dance' and 'Flower Dance'. The first section, 'Seed Dance', expresses both the birth of life and the seeds of democracy. There is a small altar in the middle of the stage. At the beginning, the performer walks round the stage with a band of musicians called *Samulnori*, that consists of four percussionists who play *koanggari* (a kind of small gong), *Ganggu* (a kind of drum), *jing* (a kind of gong) and *buk* (a kind of big drum). While the musicians take their place at the side of the stage, Lee then burns incense in front of the altar in order to call on the spirit of the deceased. This is reminiscent of the act of purification in traditional shaman rituals. After this invocation, Lee begins to dance. Throughout this 'Seed Dance' her movements are gentle and invoke an intimate kinesphere that can be read as symbolic of the first signs of life.

The second and third scenes, 'Water Dance' and 'Fire Dance', are similar to the main part of the shaman ritual, in which the performer 'soothes the pains of the spirit'. In the 'Water Dance', Lee brings a pot on stage and splashes herself with water. Her movements gradually increase in size and until she is plunging her head into the water while waving her legs and arms in the air. In the next section she dances around a bundle of burning sticks. The choreography becomes faster and more intense incorporating twisting, contracting, stretching and falling movements. Both scenes can be interpreted as being based on acts of torture.



The final 'Flower Dance' corresponds closely to third part of the shaman ritual wherein the performer 'leads the spirits of the dead to heaven'. In *Barammaji*, Lee expands upon this traditional notion by interpreting this transcendence as symbolic of a journey towards a more harmonic, and democratic, future.



Figure 5: Lee, Ae-ju's *Barammaji*.

The choreography of *Barammaji* is mainly derived from traditional Korean dance such as *salpuri ch'um* and *Seungmu* (monk dance).<sup>13</sup> To this end, *Barammaji* contains an earth-bound rather than elevated quality along with curved, rather than extended, arm lines. The feet are neither overly pointed nor flexed while the leg movements suggest a certain level of restraint. Although Lee's choreography is based on traditional Korean



dance, however, she does incorporate her own individual style. For example, and especially in the two central 'torture sections' she introduces powerful twisting and stretching movements in order to suggest extremes of human suffering.

### 3.5.3. The evolution of tradition.

As suggested by this close analysis, *Barammaji* is one of the few examples of a dance that upholds a Korean tradition by employing forms of indigenous religious ritual in order to comment on more contemporary political or social matters. Like the shaman ritual, the structure of *Barammaji* is constructed as: *Apuri* (the opening scene), *Bonpuri* (the main scene) and *Duepuri* (the closing scene). Although both the structure and choreographic style are based on *salpuri ch'um* and *Seungmu*, however, *Barammaji* is not a simple copy of traditional Korean forms.

According to Chae (1984), tradition only achieves meaning when it is used in order to address more contemporary scenarios. To that end, and in order to depict the suffering due to the fascist suppression by the military government and the desire for democracy, Ae-ju Lee needed to reinterpret tradition. Thus, in *Barammaji*, indigenous ideas are thus revived and re-interpreted through more contemporaneous movement codes in order to articulate contemporary issues.

For example, in the 'Seed Dance', Lee 'calls on the spirits' of the students and citizens who were killed by the police and secret agents just as a shaman 'calls on the spirits of the dead' in the first part of the ritual. In the 'Water Dance and 'Fire Dance', Lee 'expresses the resentment of the dead' through the combination of mime and dance movements just as a shaman 'soothes the pains of the spirits' with recitation and dancing. The difference between shaman ritual and Lee's choreography, however, is the interpretation of a traditional 'releasing of the spirits of the dead from their pains' into a more contemporaneous expression of anti-government feeling. Furthermore, while the last part of the shaman ritual focuses on 'the peaceful settlement of the released spirits into the spiritual world', the 'Flower Dance' final section of *Barammaji* translates this journey to symbolise a release from oppression and the embracing of democracy.

Not only do shaman dance and Lee's work follow a similar structure but *Barammaji* also adopts the characteristics of magical realism wherein the 'spirits of the dead' are incarnated in the body of the performer. This magical property provides a uniquely expressive mode wherein the performance shifts between both past and present and also between an earthly and spiritual realm. It is through this shifting perspective that Lee's work contrasts the existing South Korean political situation against the dead victims of its brutal regime.

As in shaman dance, the dancer in *Barammaji* communicates with the audience throughout the entire performance. For Lee, this ongoing interactivity corresponds to



her modulating her movements in response to what she believes to be the mood of the audience. Furthermore, in her programme notes to *Barammaji*, she describes how she not only responds, but actively manipulates the emotional reactions of the spectators. To this end, Lee's dancing is not completely pre-planned but develops through a combination of set movement sequences and improvisation. This responsive policy, as with the structure and magical characteristics, is derived from traditional shaman performance practice. In her programme notes, Lee describes herself as a dancer and not a choreographer, arguing that dance does not require pre-composition but, rather, is a spontaneous act.<sup>14</sup>

Although Lee's differentiation between dance and choreography is problematic, her reasoning stems from the desire to distance her aesthetic principles from those of western performance practice and, at the same time, forge a link between her works and a Korean dance tradition. Her criticism is that. Since the colonial period, Western art forms have enjoyed a superior status in comparison to non-western ones. To this end, she argues that it is a moral duty for Korean practitioners to challenge this hierarchy by exploring indigenous practices and rejecting 'foreign' conventions. With the end of the authoritarian regime in Korea in the early 1990s, however, the primary concerns of National Dance shifted and those who wished to explore a more interactive policy considered Lee's 'street-based' ultranational stance too extreme. To this end, Lee, like other members of National Dance started to embrace the broader political remit of democratic rights. An initial 1980s, and somewhat simplistic, 'agit-propaganda'

ideology was therefore modified, sophisticated and given a more professional foundation as National Dance moved from street to theatre.

### 3.6. The outlook of National Dance in the 1990s.

If the 1980s witnessed the initial development of National Dance's 'underground' social agenda, the 1990s saw a second stage shift towards the creation of a more mainstream theatre-based aesthetic. In 1993, many members of National Dance formed the National Dance Committee (Minjok Ch'um Wewonwhoi) of the ANA (Association of National Artists). This Committee then established the National Dance Festival in order to promote an understanding of the ideas and practices of National Dance. Between 1994 and 2002, this festival has seen the participation of more than sixty different dance groups (pamphlets of the 1<sup>st</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> National Dance Festivals).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, throughout the 1990s, this festival was the only forum for National Dance. Consequently, a large percentage of dance companies in South Korea now perform under the name of National Dance. As a result, today, National Dance no longer retains a specific mandate but, rather, embraces a wide range of different, but socially sensitive, practices in South Korea. Moreover, new dance techniques are developed both through an east/west discourse and the fostering of experimentation.

Although there has been a significant change of emphasis between the 1980s and 90s, however, National Dance has continued to pursue a policy of political awareness. To



this end, major changes in the political landscape of South Korea have been both addressed and, in some cases, directly challenged by National Dance practitioners: a freedom of expression only possible due to the democratisation of South Korea in 1992. Furthermore, the arrival of a democratic system of government brought with it a new social movement and its concern with the environment, feminism and other minority causes. Democracy also saw the overcoming of a previously widespread 'red complex', wherein anti-Communist and anti-North Korea rhetoric was rife. These key issues, central to this new social movement, were subsequently addressed by many National culture groups including the National Dance Committee. Furthermore, the National Dance Committee, as member of the Association of National Artists, has retained an identifiable left-wing bias that contrasts with the more conservative ideology of the Association of Korean Artists.<sup>16</sup>

The shift towards democracy brought with it an identifiable change in emphasis wherein a 1970s and 80s concern with challenging the authoritarian government and widespread censorship became a 1990s attention to more aesthetic matters. Democratic freedom also saw a change in status for the National Dance Committee from that of underground organisation to a more mainstream professional body. After 1992, virtually all National Dance works were theatre based rather than part of political social demonstrations. Furthermore, subject-matter changed from overtly political issues such as democratic and workers' rights and national unification to new social issues such as the environment, feminism, technology and globalisation.<sup>17</sup> This thematic change was



matched by a shift in choreographic practice with the embracing of various, often quite diverse, techniques such as ballet, modern dance, *han'guk muyong* (Korean Dance), martial arts and even 'hip-hop'. In contrast works based on traditional forms virtually disappeared.<sup>18</sup>

This erosion of tradition has been a cause for concern for many Korean practitioners who claim that there is no longer any sense of 'nationality' to National Dance. As such, they ask, how can it continue to represent Korean concerns, particularly the legacy of colonialism whose imprint, they claim, can be seen in the lack of progress towards reunification between a communist North and capitalist South? Only with the removal of the partition, they believe, will the 'ghost' of colonialism finally be completely exorcised.

Furthermore, the widespread use of theatre venues, they claim, has destroyed the folk-based communal and celebratory dimension so important to pre-democratic National Dance works. In other words, has National Dance, in the 1990s, lost sight of its original goal? That is, to overcome Eurocentrism and, in so doing, restore to Korean dance a national identity.

By ignoring traditional folk dance, some critics believe that certain key aspects of National Dance have been lost: that is, an indigenous body-imagery and a unique performer/spectator dialogue. These traditional-based elements have, during the 1990s,

gradually given way to a desire to explore new, and less nationalist, vocabularies of expression. To this end, it seems that, like oil and water, Korean and Western dance forms cannot be mixed together.

During a 1990s much-needed shift to democracy, National Dance lost its initial 'agit-propaganda' dynamic that it nurtured during the previous decade. Without the strict and brutal regime of the authoritarian government to challenge and the subsequent artistic freedom, National Dance, underwent a 'softening' process and in so doing, sacrificed its national heritage. To this end, and in order to 're-discover' this sense of 'national identity', one of the most influential National Dance works of the 1980s has been explored in detail; Ae-ju Lee's *Barammaji* (1987).

### 3.7. Conclusion.

This chapter began with a discussion of the importance of Nationalism and, more significantly, how post-colonial Korean practitioners have attempted to re-discover a sense of National identity through the adoption of indigenous traditional dance forms. This desire led to the formation of National Dance and, starting on the street during the 1980s, the pursuit of an 'agit-propaganda' performance ideology. With the downfall of the authoritarian government and the introduction of democracy however, this radicalism became redundant and National Dance adopted a more professional status and moved into theatre venues. As a result, the original aggressive social policies

transformed, under the banner of the new social movement, into the exploration of minority and environmental concerns. Part of this combined geographical and ideological shift was the softening of a previously anti-western stance. Rather than simply rejecting non-indigenous performance conventions the new, and more sophisticated, concern was with trying to combine Korean tradition with Western modernity.

In order to understand how traditional forms were utilised during the early, formative, period of National Dance, an influential work, *Barammaji*, by Ae-ju Lee was examined. Key to Lee's pro-Nationalist performance style was the adoption of both a traditional structure and quasi-improvisatory character. Although Lee's 'agit-prop' approach to performance was, during authoritarian government, considered appropriate, her ultranationism was later considered by many as too extreme. As a result, and following the subsequent shift to democracy, she abandoned her previously radicalist ideals and concentrated solely on traditional forms. Elsewhere, other National Dance practitioners continued to participate in festivals and produce new works throughout the 1990s but, without an authoritarian government to challenge, adopted a more internalised and less reactionary performance strategy.

Chae, one of the main critics of Korean dance, argues that this shift from counter-culture movement to mainstream professionalism has resulted in the loss of indigenous character. He points to a lack of contrast between works produced by National Dance



choreographers and those from more dominant dance genres such as ballet and modern dance. Moreover, in the change from pro-Nationalism to interculturalism, notions such as indigenous body image and movement quality have been abandoned. To this end, he questions to what extent National Dance has ultimately contributed to the formation of a contemporary Korean dance theory and practice. Does National dance still retain an active social function or has it been consigned to history?

Dance, like all other art forms, is a cultural practice and is therefore subject to all forms of change. South Korea, at the end of the twentieth century, bears little resemblance to South Korea during the 1980s when National Dance first appeared. As such, the original tenets of National Dance have given way to new concerns and this, in turn, has encouraged further creative development. In other words, new subject-matter requires a new vocabulary of expression. Therefore, the next Part of this exposition will present a series of close analyses in order to identify this 'new vocabulary'. Of concern will be, to what extent late twentieth century Korean dance work still bears the traces of a National Dance ancestry. Such notions as, dance as an agent of social change, the fusing of Eastern and Western dance styles as a creative impulse, the artistic value of tradition in contemporary work, the use of alternative performance spaces, and the celebration of indigenous culture will be the main topics of research into more recent Korean dance practitioners and their work.

The purpose of this strategy will then form the basis of an investigation of to what extent the evolution of National Dance's practice can be read as a means of overcoming Eurocentrism. To this end, two identifiable strategies in more contemporary dance practice will be considered. First, the use of traditional Korean characteristics and, second, a dialogical process of 'intercultural interaction'.

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<sup>1</sup> According to James Brandon (1990), the intracultural is connected to the intercultural. Interculturalism refers to the act of looking for national traditions that have often been forgotten, corrupted or repressed. Intraculturalism, on the other hand, explains the reassessment of the sources of contemporary performance and the desire to understand more deeply what impact external forces have upon the transformation of indigenous culture.

<sup>2</sup> Because the authorities believed that my dance performances incited rebellion, throughout the 1980s I too was kept under a close scrutiny.

<sup>3</sup> Duyul Song is a Korean professor at department of Sociology Munster University at German. He is a victim of national division. Because of this, he is not allowed to come to South Korea until present, because he visited North Korea several time (visiting North Korea even meeting North Korean is against present 'social security law').

<sup>4</sup> 'Grand Theatre' is a hybrid total art form developed from traditional mask dance and Western drama.

<sup>5</sup> These individuals (after they graduated from their university) left the culture arena and joined this political movement. Others focused simply on reinvigorating the traditional mask dance form, which had for them a romantic appeal which in itself would provide a means of resistance. They established groups to preserve traditional dance forms, such as a Society of *Bongsan* Mask Dance. More participants in the movement focused explicitly on the social function of the mask dance as social protest. They tried to combine the social function and antistatic quality of mask dance. The work of the mask dance and drama group *Handure* is a good example of this.

<sup>6</sup> Korean mask dance is still performed as a folk dance today, though on a much smaller scale and outside of the main genres of the dance field.

<sup>7</sup> There is a drama club in each university. The university dramas follow Western drama instead of developing traditional Korean mask dances or puppet theatre. However, the drama club of the Ewha Women's University rejected the western style drama, and tried developing Korean style drama.

<sup>8</sup> The original proponents were Ae-ju Lee and Hae-suk Kang, who were dancers and professors of dance studies at a university, and Ji Hyeon Lee, Eun Young Lee and myself, who in the 1980s were members of a younger generation of dancers.

<sup>9</sup> The NTU is an organisation concerned with both welfare and education. In particular the NTU is concerned with reforming the brutally competitive educational system.

<sup>10</sup> When a military coup took place in 1980, a great number of people resisted it. Some military corps killed hundreds of people in Kwangju. The military leader became President without election. People demanded that the government uncover the truth of the Massacre.

<sup>11</sup> On November 1970, Jeon, Tae-il burnt himself to death to draw attention to workers' grievances. Workers' rights were entirely violated in the 1970s. For example, no trade union was allowed by the authorities at all at that time. Tae-il's death has been mourned in the name of labour movement because of its symbolic meaning.

<sup>12</sup> *Barammaji* was first performed in the streets of Seoul in 1986 as part of a political demonstration. As there are no detailed records of this 'street version' of the work, however, the performance examined will



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be the one that took place at the Yeonu Theatre in 1987.

<sup>13</sup> It was for her mastery of these traditional dances that Lee was designated a Human Cultural Asset or *Ingan Munwhajae*

<sup>14</sup> Programme note for 1987 performance of *Barammaji*.

<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed list of companies involved, see Appendix Table 2.

<sup>16</sup> Unlike the Association of National Artists, the Association of Korean Artists was supported by the previous authoritarian governments.

<sup>17</sup> For a list of these National Dance works see Appendix table 2.

<sup>18</sup> For example, out of 22 pieces performed at the Sixth National Dance Festival, only three were traditional-based.

**Part Two.**

**ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL WORKS.**

## Introduction to Part Two.

This Part of the exposition will be concerned with the close analysis of three contemporary Korean dance works.<sup>1</sup> The first of these works, Sang-gun Han's *Kkocksin* – *Foot Trace* ('*Flower Shoes*', 1999), is an example of Korean Creative dance whereas the other two, Jung-hee Lee's *Salpuri 9* (1992) and Chung-ho Nam's *Pallae* ('*Laundry*', 1993) are Korean modern dance works.<sup>2</sup> By pursuing two specific strategies, namely, to what extent these three works represent both the evolution of tradition and the outcome of a process of intercultural interaction, the purpose of this Part will be to examine in what ways late twentieth century choreography in Korea can be read as a challenge to Eurocentrism.

The previous Part of this exposition has already outlined how National Dance works have exploited either a pro-Nationalist and pro-traditionalist strategy or a more decentring and intercultural approach in order to overcome the hierarchical legacy of colonialism. To this end, to what extent these two different ideologies can be read in works by Han, Lee and Nam will be the focus of this Part Two.

As the concern of this Part is with reading dance works according to their potential for disrupting the eurocentric legacy in Korea, either through an investment in tradition or interculturalism, more formalist and ahistorical models of dance analysis will not be suitable. What is needed is a method of analysis that is not only 'open' and sensitive to the specific socio-historical background to individual post-colonial Korean dance works, but can also avoid the tendency to essentialise non western dance practice as 'other' to a



Euro-American standard. To this end, the chosen analytical frame is based upon the 'intertextual' model developed by Janet Adshead-Lansdale.

To date, very little research into contemporary Korean dance has been produced either in Korea itself or elsewhere. This paucity of existing criticism is problematic as, apart from a few anthropologically based methods of enquiry, there is a serious deficit in models of dance analysis specific to the reading of Korean dance work. Moreover, and due to its relative infancy, Adshead-Lansdale's 'intertextual' model has yet to find a place in the analyses of non-western theatre dance. As has already been detailed in this study, there are key differences between western and eastern theatre dance practice that need to be acknowledged, particularly for a study devoted to the overcoming of Eurocentrism in post-colonial Korean performance. To this end, a conditional application of the Adshead-Lansdale model will be used to read the dance works in this study. For example, a property unique to Korean dance is the intimate and interactive nature of the relationship between the performer and the spectator: a factor that will have important repercussions on how Adshead-Lansdale's theoretic is applied to the readings of the dance works.

### Methodology.

One of the key strands of thought that can be read as contributing to the notion of 'intertextuality' is based upon Umberto Eco's (1984) structuralist theory concerning the role of the reader in deciphering texts. In particular, he argues that the text is an 'open' construction whose completion depends upon the active engagement by the reader. He

later modifies this theory by claiming that, in contrast to much postmodern literary theory that postulates that any text is open to an infinite number of readings, the text itself proposes its own 'model' reader 'corresponding to real and justifiable possibilities set by the text' (Lechte, 1994: 128). To this end, meaning is always conditional upon factors including society, culture, history and the readers experience of other texts.

Eco's notion of a balance between univocal and infinite meaning is, elsewhere, further expanded by Marco De Marinis (1993). He points out that, according to a post-modern understanding of identity as no longer absolute and discrete, the notion of a 'fixed' text has been deconstructed. Furthermore, the concept of 'text' has been expanded to include not only written material but also film, visual art and, most importantly, dance performance. It is this notion of De Marinis' 'performing text' that can be understood as forming the basis of Adshead Lansdale's subsequent concept of the 'dancing text'. As such, the dance, as 'text', is no longer understood as a discrete entity but, rather, as it exists in relation to other texts.

According to De Marinis (1993), there are two codes through which a text can be read. First, is co-textual analysis wherein the concern is with examining 'internal' properties. For dance this includes gesture, sound, costumes and properties, etc. Second, is the contextual search for 'external' elements such as cultural, historical and political reference. De Marinis (1993) goes on to suggest that the process of creating the work, as well as the work itself, should contribute to this part of the analysis. It is this process of investigating the background of the work that, De Marinis argues, provides the key intertextual dimension. Moreover, it is this concept that Adshead (1999: 12) elsewhere,



suggests, forms the basis of interpreting dance, wherein 'meanings are created in the space between dance text and other texts'. As such, intertextual interpretation promotes ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning over any notion of 'certainty' or 'truth' wherein the reader is actively encouraged to continually choose among various possibilities of interpretation. The wider implications of this strategy, she explains, concerns how it 'opens up the discourse of "art" to cultural practice more widely' (1999: 13).

Similar to De Marinis, Adshead also points out how meaning is created through a non-hierarchical and dialogical process in which the analyst, choreographer, dance work and aspects of relative socio-political background converge to create the new dance text.

This, she claims, introduces elements of mobility and instability that, as an antidote to previous monological models based upon a western scientific rationality, allows for aspects of gender, age and ethnicity to be 'woven' into the intertextual tapestry.

Intertextuality, therefore, can be understood as a creative, rather than merely descriptive, process, the outcome of which, she identifies as a new 'dance text.' In this respect, she continues, 'the reader is not, then, a parasite upon a fixed object, sucking its life blood, but a co-creator of a mobile text, breathing new life into *a dancing text*' (1999:21, original italics).

It is this 'intertextual' model, developed by Adshead-Lansdale, that will be used in this exposition. Of concern will be the extent to which this 'open' strategy will uncover new and multiple meanings from existing dance works.



One of the dangers of adopting this intertextual approach, wherein meaning is articulated through a 'sea' of texts, however, is that the dance work itself may either be reduced to a metaphor or even completely 'disappear'. To this end, key to Adshead-Lansdale's theory is that the dance work itself must always retain priority in the search for meaning. Her suggestion is that a certain amount of detailed formal analysis needs to be included in the reading process. Following this directive, the following analyses in this Part Two will begin from the perspective of the dance work itself and, from that basis, expand to comment upon other 'external' texts. This, then, will form the anti-eurocentric strategy of the analyses. Moreover, by starting from the dance work, the risk of adopting a dualistic concept wherein what is indigenous is read only as it contrasts to what is western should be avoided. Instead, of concern will be how seemingly disparate elements are fused in the choreographic process and to what extent this contributes to the ways in which the work actively produces meaning.

This notion of dance as agent of meaning used in this study corresponds to what Susan Leigh-Foster (1995:15) describes as 'bodily writing' wherein the moving body 'is capable of generating not just practice, but also ideas'. Furthermore, this fits in with Adshead-Lansdale's own theory concerning how the 'new dance text' is created through a dialogical relationship between performer and spectator. This 'raw' data is then contextualised in a framework of contemporaneous Korean socio-political history, relevant biographical detail and pertinent commentary drawn from dance literature.

## **Chapter Four.**

**Korean Creative dance and the challenge to Eurocentrism:  
Sang-gun Han's *Kkocksin* (1999).**

#### 4.1. Introduction.

*Kkocksin* (1999) marks the outcome of a twenty-year creative process by the Korean choreographer Sang-gun Han. He combines and manipulates both traditional Korean dance movements and some of the key aspects of Western theatre dance practice in a work that, it will be claimed, explores the contemporary Korean female psyche. To this end, this analysis will concern how his fusion of tradition and modernity and east and west can be read as an example of an intercultural response to the post-colonial demise of indigenous cultural practice.

*Kkocksin* can be categorised as a Korean Creative dance work whose movement vocabulary and technique are based on traditional Korean dance. As Van Zile (1998) points out, however, Western dance forms have also contributed to the development of Korean Creative dance. Furthermore, *Sinmuyong* (Korean New Dance), the root of Creative dance, was influenced by German New Dance.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, at the core of Korean Creative dance, a certain 'tension' between the past and the present can be identified. On the one side is a sense of preservation, while, on the other is a more 'evolutionary' ideology wherein some choreographers, including Han, have extended more traditional movement vocabularies by incorporating more modern, western elements. Through a 'Korean-sensitive' use of Adshead-Lansdale's 'intertextual' model, of concern will be to what extent this 'tension' can be identified in *Kkocksin* and, furthermore, how this impacts upon a reading of this work as an intercultural 'antidote' to Eurocentrism in contemporary Korean dance practice.



#### 4.2. Sang-gun Han.

Han was born in Seoul in 1953. He has been influenced by drama, film, traditional dance and Western dance. While at Hanyang Art School (a secondary school) he was interested both in film and also in traditional Korean dance including mask dance. After leaving the school in 1972, instead of going on to University, Han started to work in the theatre. Between 1973 and 1978 he joined the Changchang Theatre Company and, as assistant to the director Jin-sun Lee, contributed to the creation of eight drama pieces.

This experience had a strong influence on his subsequent dance career in that, due to a sense of dissatisfaction with what he felt were the limitations of spoken dialogue, he recognised that a new form of theatre performance involving somatic movement was needed. He never completely abandoned this initial performance training, however, and certain dramaturgical conventions continued to influence his subsequent choreographic work.

Han was also influenced by the 1970s revival of Korean mask dance that came about as a response to the widespread concern amongst dance practitioners with what was believed to be the erosion of a Korean sense of identity. Consequently, key aspects of mask dance continued to contribute to both the form and subject-matter of much Korean dance, and more specifically to Han's canon, during the rest of the decade. In 1973, Han began to learn *Kangyreung* mask dance from Sil-ja Kim and Jung-sun Kim, who are *Muhyong munwhajae* (Intangible Cultural Assets).<sup>4</sup> He then became an integrated member of the *Muhyong munwhajae* in 1979. Subsequently, he joined the Seoul City

Dance Company as a dancer where he also learned traditional Korean dance forms, including *Monk dance*, *Taepeng-mu*, *Jinsoi-mu*, *Choyong-mu* and *Salpuri-ch'um*.<sup>5</sup>

Like mask dance, these other traditional forms contributed to the development of Han's choreographic style although not without modification. Han explains, 'I use the breath from Korean traditional dance, but I don't copy any movement from traditional dance. The body position [in contemporary] needs to change to upright.'<sup>6</sup> Rather than simply copying, his is a more creative and interpretative process. For example, apart from traditional dance he also draws choreographic inspiration from everyday movements such walking, sitting and even seemingly static poses.

During his time with the SCDC, and encouraged by his first and second directors Il-chi Maun and Jung-hae Bae, Han started to choreograph his first works. He also formed his own company, *Ahop (Ninth)*, in 1983 with some of his colleagues. Not long after its inception, Ahop became part of a new theatre dance movement that supported young choreographers and experimental dance works. These small-scale works were then premiered at venues such as Space Theatre and The Small Theatre of King Seajong Culture Centre in Seoul.<sup>7</sup>

The first work Han created for SCDC was *Mucho* (1983).<sup>8</sup> According to the critic Jong-ho Lee (1984), *Mucho* concerns the hardships faced by members of the Korean lower classes. This work was subsequently revived the following year as part of the launch of Ahop. Han's next work, *Choksaek Kyongbo (Red Signal)*, was first performed in July



1987 at the Battangkol Small Theatre and tells of a confrontation between the innocent masses and a powerful cabal (Kim, September 2000).

Han's early success gained him a scholarship from the Korea Arts Council in 1991 to study, for one year, at the *Ecole de Spectacle* in Paris. While there he studied Western contemporary dance, including the work of Pina Bausch, along with modern dance techniques, jazz and dramaturgy. In September 1992 he returned to the SCDC and used these western performance techniques in a new work called *Bihaeng*.

A concern with national issues is a theme that runs through all of Han's works. He has also been a member of the Minjockchoom (Korean National Dance) Committee since 1989. Minjockchoom Committee forms part of The Korean People's Artist Foundation (KPAF) that, founded in December 1988, is the first progressive artists' federation to be created after The Second World War.

1994 marked the one hundredth celebration of the *Donghak* revolution, which was the first people's revolution in Korean modern times. As part of the festivities, Han created a work called *Nockdu-kkock* which, as the name of a native Korean flower, is also the recognised symbol of the leader of the revolution, Bong-jun Chen. In the same year, Han also produced the small-scale work, *Doragi-kkock Halmi-kkock*, a choreographic depiction of the enforced prostitution of young Korean women by the Japanese army during the Second World War. As Kyeng-ae Kim (November 1995) explains, this piece reflects Han's socio-historical consciousness through dance characteristics and dramaturgical spectacle.



After studying for a Masters Degree at Chung-ang University, Han went on to become the artistic director of Daejeon City Dance Company in April 2001. Still in residence, Han continues to choreograph works that fuse his early education in spoken theatre and traditional dance, his later exposure to western performance practice and dance forms as well as his passionate concern with raising awareness of National issues such as the plight of the lower classes and women. These themes are all encapsulated in *Kkocksin* (1999), a work that, choreographed to music by Philip Preer and performed on a set designed by Whan-gue Kang, explores the suffering of Korean women under the rule of patriarchy, either through parents or married life

*Kkocksin* (1999) is in four Parts: 'Waiting', 'Meeting', 'Leaving' and 'Watching the Traces'. A detailed description of the entire work would be beyond the parameters of this study. Instead, and following a brief account of the structure, this analysis will focus mainly on describing and interpreting the opening section, 'Waiting', in which, it will be argued, much of the most significant choreographic material can be found.

#### 4.3. Structure of *Kkocksin*.<sup>9</sup>

In the opening part of the work, 'Waiting', a trio of female dancers wearing long white dresses stand between three bands of white material stretched across the floor. These white bands are studded with small white flowers. They also wear *kkocksin* ('flower shoes') that, according to traditional Korean culture, are only worn on special occasions including weddings. They are also all holding small bouquets of flowers. The choreography for this Part is a combination of minute foot movements, moments of stillness and gentle tilting gestures and is accompanied by a slow and solemn soundtrack. They also perform in canon with one dancer repeating the gestures previously executed by the other which are then copied by a third. There is no eye-contact between the dancers or with the audience, the gaze of the women being predominantly downcast.

This opening Part is followed by 'Meeting' in which the three women are joined by a trio of male dancers wearing tailcoats and carrying long sticks. Two of the men are also on stilts. The main choreographic motif in this Part is based on simple walking patterns which is embellished with little jumps, crouching postures and tilts. The end of this Part is marked by the three women removing their dresses revealing traditional Korean underwear (*gojaengi*) that consists of white trousers and tee-shirts. The men pick up the dresses from the floor with their canes and leave the stage.



Part Three, 'Leaving', the three women begin to push, pull, lift and twist the bands of material. The atmosphere in this part is livelier with the inclusion of an idiosyncratic shrugging gesture, rapid spins, sitting, falling and rolling movements included in the choreography. After placing their bouquets carefully on the floor and beneath the bands that are now held high above the stage, the women continue to dance but with increasingly less energy. Finally they remove their 'flower shoes,' hang them from the suspended bands, and exit from the stage.

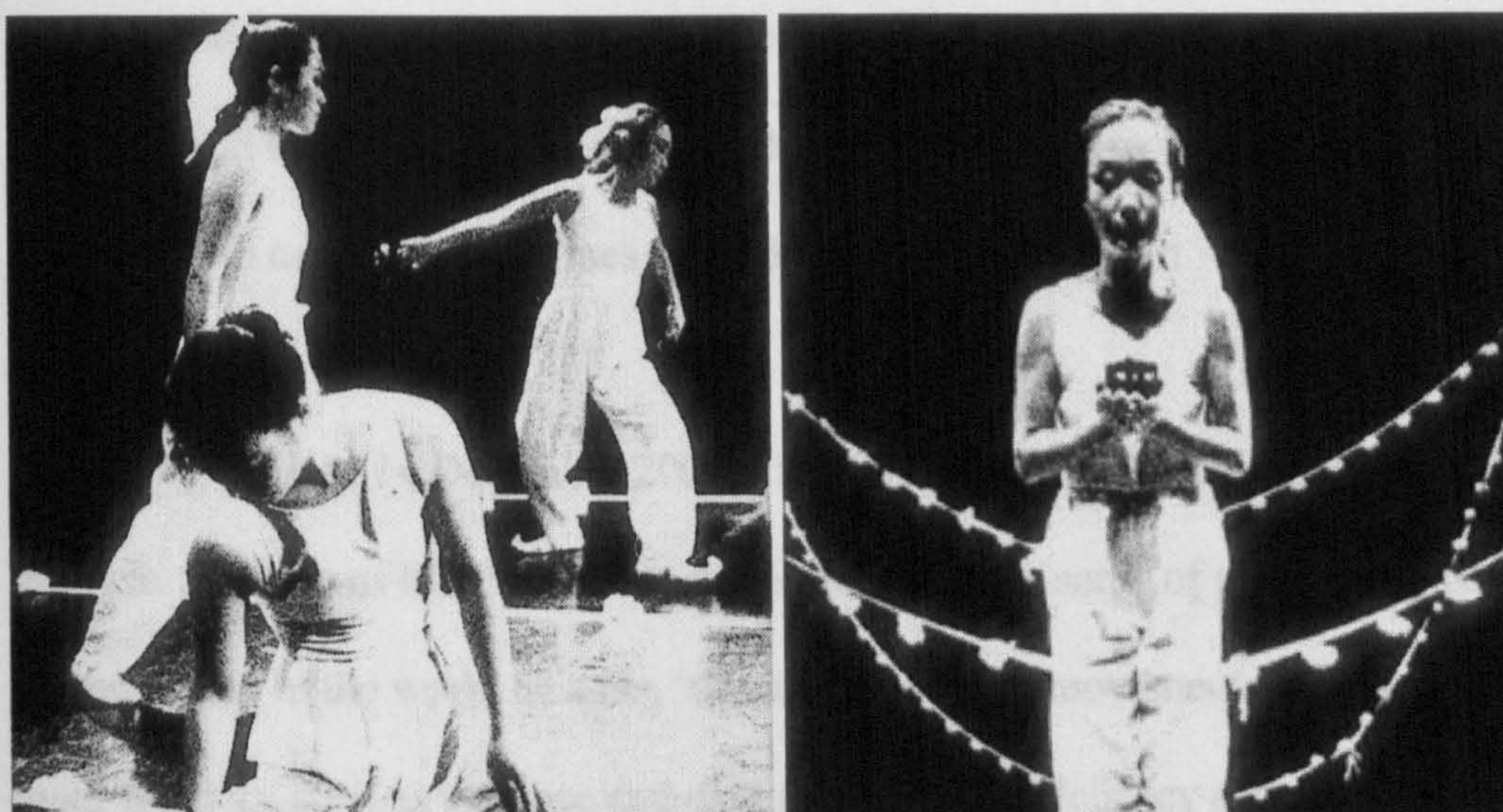


Figure 6: 'Leaving the Way'

The final Part of *Kkocksin*, 'Watching the Traces', is danced by the three men. The stage is shrouded in a white smoke and the three bands form a series of upright curves. Circled by the two men in stilts, the third male dancer (the choreographer) whose face is painted half white and half black, performs a sequence that includes staccato, swinging arm gestures. Simultaneously, the other two men begin to smash the flower-bands with their canes. As the soloists' movements increase in intensity and violence, red liquid



begins to spray from the end of the canes. The work ends with the solo male dancer on his knees at the front of the stage with his head thrown back.

#### 4.4. Close analysis of Part One of *Kkocksin*, 'Waiting'.

At the beginning of the performance, the three female dancers, wearing identical wedding dresses and carrying small bouquets of flowers, execute a gesture that, according to Han, carries symbolic weight. While standing in a slightly turned out first position and holding their long skirts to expose their feet, each dancer slowly walks her right foot out to the right in a heel/toe pattern before bringing it back again. This gesture is repeated in canon several times throughout this opening Part.

According to Han (14 December 2000, interview) the subtitle of the piece, *Foot Trace*, refers to the trace of life. Moreover, and in reference to some of the more idiosyncratic gestures used in the work, he adds, 'these detailed foot movements express the women's inner feelings, such as patience and excitement'. Their delicacy and precision also suggest an initial exploration of an intimate, and archetypal feminine, kinesphere. Quasi- minimalist and abstract gestures such as these, derived from traditional Korean dance forms including *Salpuri ch'um* but infused with a more modern nuance, are often used by Han in his works. For example, in *Doragikkoch Halmikkoch* (Han, 1995), he incorporates two similar bent-knee walking patterns where the dancers either execute rapid and tiny shuffling steps or more sustained steps leading with the heel rather than the toe. These two travelling motifs, loosely based on traditional Korean dance, also appear frequently throughout *Kkocksin*.

Another similar travelling sequence that blends eastern tradition with western modernity is when the three female dancers, with their legs slightly turned out in a quasi-balletic fifth position and their knees bent, walk in little circles. Sometimes they move in a clockwise and, at other times, an anti-clockwise direction. Another way in which the dancers shift from one point on the stage to another is through a variation on the balletic *chassé*, wherein, in a gentle sliding motion, the dancer bends their knees, extends a leg and transfers their weight from one foot to another. Interspersed with these travelling sequences is a unique method of changing body-direction and focus. This is an idiosyncratic bent-knee and flexed-feet *rond-de-jambe* gesture wherein the dancer lifts a leg in front, turns it to the side of their body and executes a large, sustained step.

Nearly all the gestures executed in this first Part of *Kkocksin* are extremely slow and sustained. Occasionally, however, the dancers perform sudden sharp turns of the head and tilts of the upper body. These gestures are then followed by moments of almost complete stillness: a performance technique that injects a level of tension into the choreography. Another method through which the choreography manufactures this tense atmosphere is the use of the arms. Most of the time the arms are held close to the body, either holding the dress or the flowers. Occasionally, however, the dancer will slowly extend a single arm to the side but at the same time, look and tilt in the other direction. The arm will then quickly be retracted followed by another moment of stillness. The tension produced through this two-way dynamic between gaze and movement and sustained and rapid activity is further enhanced by the sombre blue lighting and melancholic instrumental soundtrack.

As this description of some of the key elements of the choreography to the first Part of *Kkocksin* suggests, the movement material used by Han is based on the combination of both a traditional Korean movement vocabulary and more western dance codes, both ballet and other, more contemporary, styles. This hybrid process of interpreting tradition through the filter of the present can also be read according to a bodily code. While the lower half of the female dancers seem to execute movements heavily influenced by traditional Korean dance and their more stereotypical feminine code, the upper half of the body moves according to a less gender-specific and more angular and erect western movement vocabulary. Where these two halves of the body intersect (the lower more traditional and the upper more modern halves) is how each influences the quality of the other. For example, the use of the more erect (western) posture imbues the leg movements with a strength and range not found in traditional Korean dance. Likewise, the 'traditional' bent-knee posture and travelling motif has a 'softening' effect upon the choreography.

Han's use of traditional Korean dance is not just restricted to the movement vocabulary. Less tangible elements can also be discerned in *Kkocksin* including *chi* energy, 'invisible depth' and a form of magical realism.<sup>10</sup> Han's own interpretation of *chi* is as an 'invisible energy' that he believes, emanates from traditional Korean dance (December 2000 interview). It is this concept that, Han, claims, inspires him to try and convey a sense of 'movement through stillness' (in traditional dance this is referred to as *Jung Joong Dong*).



A sense of magical realism, similar to that which can be identified in traditional shaman dance, also infuses *Kkocksin*. For example, and in Part Three, 'Leaving', the three women manipulate the three bands of cloth before walking on them until they are offstage. According to Han (January 2000 interview), their activity and eventual departure symbolises their death, wherein the walking on the cloth suggests transcendence to a higher, spiritual plane. Furthermore, Han explains the final solo section, 'Watching the Traces', as an act of consoling the spirits of the dead women. To enhance this sense of magical realism, Han includes imagery that, he claims, has pertinent symbolic import. This includes the flowers knotted into the bands of material, in that, and according to Korean tradition, knots are associated with grief. Moreover, the white dresses worn by the three women, although most closely associated with marriage, also imbue the dancers with a ghost-like aura that is then further enhanced by their use of sustained and floating movements. This sense of 'magic' or 'spirituality' is sustained throughout the entire work: the use of subdued lighting, male dancers on stilts, the sprinkling of white powder over the stage and the red blood-like liquid issuing from the canes promotes a seemingly nightmarish scenario.

According to the dance critic Tae-won Kim (September 2000), the style of movement used by Han in *Kkocksin* are abstract, intense, repetitive and minimalist. As such, Kim adds, Han has created a form of theatre dance that, although heavily indebted to traditional Korean forms, is also in keeping with the spirit of more contemporary times. Kim points out that, as one of the most long-term members of SCDC, Han has been at the forefront of developing an indigenous dance form that both reflects and comments

upon South Korean culture in the new millennium. *Kkocksin*, Kim contends, exemplifies this desire to address contemporary social concerns.

One of the key ways in which *Kkocksin* can be identified as a contemporary interpretation of tradition is in the posture adopted by the dancers. In shaman dance, the dancer's spine is curved whereas in Han's work, it is erect. Han (interview, March 2000) explains that, today, the dancer should maintain an upright posture because the more curved position is too indicative of a pre-modern farming culture wherein labourers would both sit and sleep on the floor. Nowadays, Han observes, Korean culture is shifting rapidly towards a more 'upright' practice wherein people are more likely to use chairs and beds. It is this 'modern verticality' that Han expresses in his choreography.

This emphasis upon a more erect posture for the dancers also reflects Han's interest in exploring more Western dance codes such as ballet and other, more contemporary, forms.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Han's early experience of Pina Bausch's work, for example, can be identified in his, sometimes overt, sense of theatricality and dramatic impact. For example, the final Part of *Kkocksin* sees the almost complete destruction of the stage set and seemingly crushed and exhausted lone male dancer frozen in a kneeling position.

This seemingly down-beat and intense conclusion to *Kkocksin* can also be read as a comment upon a performance policy being adopted by other contemporary Korean choreographers. Heavily influenced by western practice, many of these choreographers have been predominantly concerned with producing decorative works that seem to have



no substance beyond the exploration of technique and formal matters. In contrast, Han's main concern, like that of Bausch, is with 'scratching the surface' of contemporary social behaviour in order to expose the otherwise invisible mechanisms of control and suppression. To this end, *Kkocksin* can be read as a damning critique of the ways through which Korean women are controlled and manipulated by the forces of institutionalised authoritarianism.

*Kkocksin*, according to Tae-won Kim (1999: 113-115), can be read as a comment upon the feudalistic roots of Korean marriage conventions that are oppressive to women. According to the Confucianist tenets of traditional Korean society, women must expect their married life to be one of unquestioning servitude and obedience. In *Kkocksin*, the suggestion is that this old-fashioned and highly patriarchal mentality, still exists. In the first Part of the work, and according to Chae-hyeon Kim (1999), the suggestion is that the female dancers, already in their bridal gowns, are awaiting the arrival of their future husbands.

In *Kkocksin*, the men take the active role in the marriage as it is they who choose their bride. That two of these men are also on stilts creates a distance between them and the women: marriage, it seems, is not the result of an intimate relationship, nor the outward declaration of mutual love, but, rather, a formal means of controlling a seemingly 'weaker' sex. According to Tae-won Kim (1999) this sense of estrangement is also symbolised by the three parallel bands with flowers tied into them, that, he contends, suggest that men and women can never experience intimacy with each other.



The lack of intimacy between the male and female dancers is, according to Chae-hyeon Kim (1999), reflected in the use of black costumes for the men and white ones for the women. In traditional Korean weddings the bride wears a very colourful dress while the man is dressed in blue. By using more sombre black and white, Kim suggests, comments upon the gradual loss of tradition due to the forces of western modernity. This, he continues, is more redolent of contemporary conflict rather than a more traditional notion of a celebratory *yin-yang* balance. This notion of struggle between eastern tradition and western modernity is further emphasised by the black and white face of the solo male dancer.

Beyond any notion of a tension between east and west and old and new, Kim also interprets the male soloist's choreography as indicative of conflict between a white 'feminine' purity and passivity and a black 'masculine' violence and dominance. Elsewhere, however, the choreographer (interview, January 2000) claims that his intention, in this last solo, was to pray for the forgiveness of men's violent behaviour towards women. This equation between masculinity and violence, he adds, is symbolised throughout the work.

According to the choreographer (interview, March 2000), while the long canes are symbolic of a phallic power, the stilts suggest the falseness of men: the oppressive control that the men wield being based on an illusion. In *Kkocksin*, masculine strength is an artificial construct rather than a biological given, and, as a consequence, can be challenged and/or deconstructed.

Surrounded by men on stilts bearing long phallic canes, and with their gazes downward, a sense of victimisation is clearly conveyed by the three women. What the work also seems to draw upon, however, is a sense of female communitarianism wherein these three women share in their suffering and sadness. Moreover, throughout the work, it is the women who continue to take a more leading role in the relationship, either by trying to link arms with the men or deliberately crossing their paths. All of these attempts, however, fail and, instead, the women form companionships between themselves. This 'spiritual' bond between the women, often symbolised by their forming a tight circle with their backs to the audience (and men) is, according to traditional dance forms such as *kang- kand-suwelre*, the only way through which emancipation (*he-bang*) can be achieved for Korean women.

That the work is articulating a general patriarchal climate in Korea rather than a more specific scenario can be inferred in the similarity between the female dancers both in terms of their costume and also their choreography. At no point during the work do any of the female dancers perform alone, nor do they use any individual gestures. The only dancer who does perform alone is male, but his half-black/half-white face suggests that, even at this point, there is no sense of discrete individuality being articulated. To enhance this notion of archetype rather than individual, none of the dancers demonstrate any obvious facial expression. While, and according to a traditional patriarchal code, for the women this expressionlessness suggests anonymity, for the men it implies a 'faceless' authoritarian power.



To this end, *Kkocksin* can be read as a work that explores the codes that regulate traditional sex roles in Korea with men as faceless oppressors and women as 'silent and invisible' victims. It is a work that can be read as an antidote to a contemporary preoccupation with idealistic and 'romantic' narratives where marriage symbolises the celebratory and stable outcome of love between men and women. Moreover, as a fantasy vehicle that promotes 'good' over 'evil' and 'right' over 'wrong', the happy marriage symbolises and represents the cornerstone of civilised (and, hence, westernised) culture. What *Kkocksin* seems to explore, is the subsequent consequence of this patriarchal construct upon women.



Figure 7: 'Watching the Traces'

Elsewhere, Sally Banes (1998) points out that, in western theatre dance, married life is rarely explored. A similar situation exists within the Korean dance arena. Of the Korean dance works wherein marriage is represented, the wife is often little more than an ugly caricature with little sense of psychological depth or character development. That



*Kkocksin* can be read as an attempt to look beyond mere caricature and towards the articulation of an 'inner' level of existence is reflected in the simple act of disrobing. The symbolic import of the removal of the wedding dress is that of 'deflowering' or even demystification. The quasi-romantic image of the wedding dress and the suggestion of purity is removed, replaced by the suggestion of self-sacrifice and sexual compliance. In a more than passing resemblance of the central theme to most Pina Bausch work, Han's *Kkocksin* uses the archetypal difference between active male and passive female sexuality as the basis for choreographic material and performance dynamic.

#### 4.5. Conclusion.

Many critics have identified *Kkocksin* as a powerful piece of feminist polemic: its dualistic concept of the female as victim and male as aggressor closely attuned to much Korean feminist propaganda. Elsewhere, however, this dichotomy has been problematised by western post-feminists dance scholars such as Banes (1998: 2) who express a concern with a long tradition wherein women are read according to unproblematised '*misérabiliste*' or 'celebrationist' polemic.

To this end, two key factors need to be addressed. First, to what extent does *Kkocksin*, as a work that is being read according to an intercultural strategy, question some of the more old-fashioned notions of gender in Korea? Second, what importance, if any, should be attached to *Kkocksin* being a work created by a male choreographer? In other words, does this work merely reflect a stereotypical concept of the Korean woman and,

hence, fail provide a positive alternative to traditional gender codes, or is *Kkocksin*, through the incorporation of a non-Korean contemporary movement vocabulary, deconstructing an essentialist notion of the third-world female as powerless.

The aggressive and destructive solo for a single male dancer that forms the conclusion to *Kkocksin* suggests that, not only are women trapped by the marriage system in Korea, but so too are men. The difference, however, is that, in *Kkocksin*, and therefore in Korean society, the man is able to access and articulate his frustration whereas the women are not. More significantly, when the performance space is occupied by both the male and female dancers, the movement vocabulary and its execution are highly suggestive of self-control and formality. There is barely any physical or eye contact between these couples throughout the work: the women with downcast faces and the men on stilts. Does this suggest that traditional codes of conduct between the sexes are so restrictive that they extinguish intimacy and expression?

The women's departure from the space during the performance is, according to the choreographer, symbolic of their death. Death, he suggests, is the only means of escape open to women trapped within loveless marriages. The male solo at the end of *Kkocksin* can be thus read not only as the articulation of sorrow and guilt but also shame for not only being favoured with controlling power within a patriarchal system due to his sex, but failing to use that power to force a change.

Ultimately, *Kkocksin* can be better understood as mans apology to women rather than a direct call for change. Moreover, it's portrayal of women as 'universal' victims, highly

reminiscent of much early western feminist polemic, does little to disrupt traditional gender constructs, and, to some extent, can even be argued as supportive of them. It is ironic perhaps that a contemporary western movement vocabulary, that can be traced back to the groundbreaking, anti-institutionalist and celebratory work of certain western pioneering female choreographers, is utilised in a work that seems more concerned with expressing a man's rather than a woman's frustration concerning an eastern gender inequality. To this end, the concern is whether it is possible to explore traditional and indigenous dance forms without, at the same time, invoking much of the old-fashioned and highly problematic ideology that supports and surrounds them. At the same time, detailed attention must be given to what impact a policy of 'fusing' the traditional and the more modern, the National with the non-National, and the East and the West, has upon the ways in which contemporary Korean dance can be read as a challenge to Eurocentrism.



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<sup>1</sup> The reason for focusing on contemporary Korean dance is because traditional Korean dance is more concerned with preservation rather than experimentation. It is in the contemporary arena and its concern with creating new vocabularies of expression, it will be argued, where the challenge to eurocentrism can be most readily identified. Furthermore, this exposition is not concerned with Korean ballet because, as was explained in Part One chapter Two, like its western counterpart, Korean ballet has continued to contribute to the erosion of indigenous creative practice and the promotion of western dance forms.

<sup>2</sup> The analyses that make up Part Two of this exposition are based on video recordings of dance works. The use of video, although crucial to the development of dance theory is, however, not without certain problems. As Stephanie Jordan (2000: 101) points out,

some of the movement may well be lost from the camera, the original spatial orientation of the dance on stage is often distorted, the dance dynamics are frequently altered (whether enhanced or diminished), and the practice of editing creates its own rhythms on top of those of the music and dance.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the use of video and film has been of enormous benefit to the study of dance as, without it, many important pieces of choreography would be lost and this, in turn, would impact upon the development of dance scholarship.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>4</sup> Many local areas have their own mask dances. The *Kangyreung* mask dance is from the county of Kangyreung, which is in the northern part of the Korean peninsula. The quality of this dance's movement is powerful and masculine, compared with the mask dance from the southern part of Korea. For example, *Yangju* mask dance, which is native to the middle of Korea, is soft and feminine.

<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to categorize monk dance because Korean dance scholars cannot agree on whether it is a kind of folk or palace dance. To this end, it is often given its own category. *Taepeng-mu* and *Jinsoi-mu* are developed from folk dance while *Choyong-mu* is a traditional palace dance developed from the story of Choyong (see chapter 2.3).

<sup>6</sup> In interview, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2000.

<sup>7</sup> See Lee, J. *Choom*, June 1984, p 89.

<sup>8</sup> *Mucho* roughly translates as 'weeds'.

<sup>9</sup> This analysis is based upon a video recording of *Kkocksin* performed at the Changmu Post Theatre in October 1999.

<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these terms, see Chapter Two.

<sup>11</sup> This interest in western dance forms is also reflected in his rehearsal method wherein, following a western classical convention, he teaches through demonstration. Unlike in more traditional Korean dance forms, in Han's company, there is a clear distinction between choreographer and dancers.

## **Chapter Five.**

**National issues and modern dance:**

**Jung-hee Lee's *Salpuri 9* (1992).**

### 5.1. Introduction.

This chapter will present an investigation into how a well-known, representative choreographer, Jung-hee Lee incorporates aspects of both traditional Korean and modern Western dance into a work that explores both the Korean War and the subsequent division of the Korean peninsula, *Salpuri 9* (1992). Through a close examination of movement material, read through the lens of contemporaneous socio-cultural texts, the concern will be to what extent *Salpuri 9* can be read as an anti-Eurocentric expression of intercultural practice.

According to Pauline Hodgens, 'dances are social and cultural products which embody, and are created and received in relation to, the conventions and traditions of a particular time and place' (Hodgens in Adshead-Lansdale, 1988:65). Moreover, and because dance is a reflection of indigenous aesthetics from a specific socio-historical background, and as Adshead herself explains (1988: 12), in order to understand dance it is necessary to understand a people's culture and history.

To this end, how *Salpuri 9* articulates meaning will, to some extent, be conditional upon the time and location of its creation: namely, 1990s South Korea. Furthermore, and in accordance with Adshead-Lansdale's intertextual model, this analysis will also incorporate critic's reviews of the work and information taken from interviews with the choreographer.



In the previous chapter, part of the analysis was concerned with how certain intangible aspects of Korean dance can still be identified in Korean creative dance, and to what extent this could be read as a response to a sense of post-colonial erosion of National identity and cultural heritage. Consequently, a similar line of enquiry will be pursued in this chapter wherein the concern will be with to what extent traditional Korean characteristics such as *he-bang* (emancipation), Communitarianism and a sense of magical realism can still be identified in a late-twentieth century experimental dance work.

Moreover, this analysis will attempt to verify the suggestion made by the Korean reviewer Tae-won Kim, that modern cultural practice in Korea, including dance, has reshaped the notion of *he-bang* (*Choom*, January 1992). How, if at all, it has changed and what impact this has on *Salpuri 9* as an intercultural work, will be considered in this analysis. Furthermore, this concept of updating Korean tradition through the processes of modern western influence will be examined alongside how these non-indigenous forces are themselves changed due to a proximity to Korean elements. In other words, to what extent *Salpuri 9* can be read as a dialogical conduit between east and west and the traditional and the modern, will be the predominant focus of this analysis.

## 5.2. Jung-hee Lee.

Lee is a dancer, mother, wife, choreographer and the artistic director of *Lee, Jung-hee Modern Dance Company*. She is also a professor in the dance department at Chung-ang University and president of The Korean Modern Dance Research Institution.

Lee was born in 1947 in Seoul. She earned both her BA and MA in the dance department at Ewha Women's University and was also a founding member of the Korea Contemporary Dance Company. In recognition of her piece *Puppet Man* (circa 1970), she was twice chosen for the honour of being one of the 'Six Representative Dancers of Korea' in the 1970s.

From 1977 to 1980 Lee lived in New York where she studied under both Martha Graham and Jose Limon. Apart from learning their techniques, she also studied experimental dance and mime. Following this period of intense training she gave her dancing debut at 'The Performing Garage' in New York.

She returned to Korea in 1980 and was employed as a lecturer at Chung-ang University. She presented *Salpuri '80* (later renamed *Salpuri I*) at the Dance Festival of Korea for which she received a major choreography and music award. The work is a dramatisation of the Kwangju massacre that she had heard about while still living in New York. Over the next thirteen years she continued to choreograph eight further works as part of the *Salpuri* series. Each work is large-scale, has its own specific theme, and combines both traditional Korean and more modern western elements in a uniquely experimental way.

For example, the very title of the series has its origins in traditional Korean culture: 'Salpuri' being the combination of two words: *sal* and *puri*. *Sal* means 'evil spirit' or baleful influence while *puri* means to 'untie' or 'vent'. Therefore, *salpuri* translates as the expulsion of evil from the body, which, in turn, closely resembles the western concept of exorcism. According to the dance scholar Hee-wan Chae (1985), in Korea, *sal* refers to situations in which something bad attacks a person or a community that must be repulsed. He adds that, in order to expel the *sal*, the victim needs to know why and from where they are being attacked. Chae goes on to explain that the cause of *sal* is societal rather than personal. Therefore *salpuri*, the elimination of the *sal*, is beneficial not only to the individual but to the entire community (Chae, 1985). It is this concept that, according to the choreographer Lee, inspired her to create the *Salpuri* series.<sup>i</sup>

Salpuri has its roots in traditional Korean dance. *Salpuri-ch'um*, one of the most popular traditional dances in South Korea, is performed as a means to exorcise evil spirits.

Developed from the final part of shaman dance (*kut*), the single dancer employs a bent-knee and spine posture common to Korean traditional dance while, at the same time, gently flicks and waves a long white scarf. Although this dance was based on ritual and, therefore, representational, according to Odenthal (1988: 44), this is no longer the case. Rather, he claims, *Salpuri-ch'um*, is now most often read as an abstract and ornamental form of choreography with no symbolic value.

To this end, and as the dance critic Yeong-tae Kim contends, it is the 'original' notion of *salpuri* as a form of exorcism that Lee uses as the basis for her series of nine dance works.



Lee's creation *salpuri* is a historical event in modern Korean dance; *salpuri* is only recognised as a folk dance but Lee reinterprets the notion of *salpuri* in her works. Her *salpuri* transcends grief and then constructs a new dance movement.

(Program note for 1993 performance of *Salpuri 9*)

Elsewhere, this notion of returning to the original concept of *Salpuri* is identified by another dance critic, Tae-won Kim (1980). In reference to the first work in the series, *Salpuri 1*, he describes it according to a successful reshaping of the particular qualities of traditional Korean dance into the 'new mould' of modern dance.<sup>ii</sup> Lee pursues this combination of the traditional and the *avant-garde* throughout the rest of the *Salpuri* series.

For example, in *Salpuri 2* (1981), which is an exploration of the relationship between humanity and nature, Lee covers the entire stage area with soil. The subject of *Salpuri 3* (1982), however, is the order and harmony of the universe in which the choreography is based upon the movement of the planets and stars. *Salpuri 4* (1983), a modernisation of a traditional Korean farmers dance, sees her setting modern western style choreography to traditional Korean music. Also, and according to Gye-wha Youm (1999), the movement is derived from Korean children's playground games. The notion of alienation as a symptom of modern society is explored in *Salpuri 5* (1984) while *Salpuri 6* (1985) marks Lee's first comment upon the North South division of Korea and its impact upon the populace.

Using the Stravinsky score for *Rite Of Spring* (1913), *Salpuri 7* explores the harmonic balance between the concepts of 'yin' and 'yang' while *Salpuri 8* (1988) sees her return

to the theme of *Salpuri 5*, that is, the modern condition. The last in the series, *Salpuri 9* (1992), describes the impact that the Korean War and the subsequent division of the peninsula had on the Korean populace.<sup>iii</sup> Lee, explains,

This piece's idea is from a negotiation between South and North Koreans. I want to deal with the Korean national division. I also think the innocent victims cry every night. So I want to depict the shape of this tragic situation.

(Personal interview, March 2001)

The *Salpuri* series was widely praised as an accurate depiction of both the political and personal issues of Korean people during the 1980s and 1990s. According to dance critic Jong-ho Lee, (*Han Kook Daily News* October 30<sup>th</sup> 1985), 'the series was a vivid expression of people's pain combining music and wonderful stage composition. Elsewhere, another reviewer, Yong-ku Park (1985) points out that '*Salpuri* succeeded in displaying dramatic elements, including the pain of separation lying deep under our lives, while excluding sentimentalism'. Tae wan Kim, meanwhile, sees the *Salpuri* series as an important evolutionary step in Korean dance. He remarks that,

*Salpuri* shows Jung-Hee Lee's brilliant choreographic talent. The effect is wonderfully vertical. It is a brave attempt expanding the scope of Korea's contemporary dance.

(*Choom*, February 1986: 105)

According to dance critic Odenthal (1998: 44), '*Salpuri 9* is perhaps the most consistent choreographic work of Jung-hee Lee and her Modern Dance Company.'

Apart from the *Salpuri* series, Lee was also involved in a number of other dance projects. For example, in 1984, Lee started performing in the street, either in front of apartment blocks, in town squares and even at the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea (Panmunjeom). The purpose of this *Spring Day, Outdoors Dancing* series was to popularize dance and bring it to people who don't usually visit the theatre. Since 1986, Lee has also created six works under the heading 'Encounter with Video' that, in collaboration with video artist and husband Dong-hyeon Lee, combine choreography with experimental film techniques. Furthermore, and since 1988, she has choreographed the first seven works in a series called *The Song of The Black Spirit*. One of these works earned her special recognition as one of the best nine choreographers at the Vienna Choreographer's Competition in 1989. In 1996, Lee underwent a major tour of South Korea including the islands of Mara-do, Jeju-do, Ulyeung-do and Tok-do as well as along the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel.

### 5.3. Structure of *Salpuri 9*.

A deep river flows during the half-century. Birds fly between broken bridges and wire entanglements. The birds laugh at humans' foolishness. A silent night scene, the spirits cannot sleep; they cry at the negotiation table.

(Pamphlet for *Salpuri 9*, translation).

*Salpuri 9* can be understood as a three-act dance work that consists of: 'Apuri', opening invitation to the audience; 'Bonpuri', the main performance and; 'Deupuri', creating a



communitarian consciousness.<sup>iv</sup> According to the programme, the second, and main section of the work, 'Bonpuri', is divided into four smaller parts: 'Remembering the war', 'Remembering the negotiation', 'Fleeing from the war' and 'Salpuri'. The company consists of a solo narrator figure, played by the choreographer herself, and a large *corps* of male and female dancers. It is Lee's role who not only binds the three parts of the work together but also directs the action. For example, in 'Apuri' she describes how she is going to invoke the spirits of the victims of the Korean war. In 'Bonpuri', she assumes the function of a 'conduit' between these victims and the audience, while, in 'Duepuri', she sweeps the stage clean: a symbolic act reminiscent of the water-sprinkling gesture performed by the shaman.



Figure 8: *Salpuri* 9 September 1992



‘Apuri’: Invocation of the spirits.

A large raised platform occupies the centre of the stage. Behind it, a large *corps* of male and female dancers, all dressed in white, sit in silence. A woman enters, dressed in black. She walks to a downstage left position and speaks.

1950. There is a fratricidal war between parts of a nation in the form of a ‘Cold War’; therefore one nation fights a severe battle with itself. The war was bought dearly by more than 4,000,000 victims. This huge destruction and its victims remain a deep grief to Koreans. South and North! The tragic division of the Korean peninsula! The victims’ spirits cannot sleep even now, and cry about their pain and anger at the negotiation table. (Translation).

While she speaks, the *corps* of dancers rise from their chairs and begin to walk downstage right and left until they surround the platform. If her speech is an invocation, these dancers are the ‘spirits’ and the raised platform becomes the negotiation table. During the course of the performance, however, the platform also comes to symbolise a battle-ground, a refugee camp and even an altar. Unlike in the more traditional shaman dance, however, the summoned spirits do not ‘enter’ the shaman’s body, but, rather appear onstage. In *Salpuri 9*, the more intangible and mystical qualities of shaman dance are transformed into something more tangible and physical.

'Bonpuri': the dance of the spirits.

#### I. 'Remembering the war'.

The dancers run onto the platform with fast, small walking steps and sit on the platform. Both their faces and half of their spiky hair are painted white. In the previous chapter it was described how one of the male soloists in *Kkocksin* (Han, 1999) has half of his face painted white. This technique, it seems is common to twentieth century dance practice in Korea. According to Korean anthropologists however, this facial decoration has its roots in traditional eastern cultural practice. For example, Su-nam Kim (*Choom*, February 1997) describes how, in Tibet during November, there is a *losar-kuk* (that translates as New Year shaman ritual) in which the performers paint their faces with white flour. This action, he explains, makes the performer feel like a god or spirit. Furthermore, he adds, this form of disguise is similar to the wearing of a mask. The Tibetan *losar-kuk*, Kim, contends, bears a striking similarity to Korean Mask Dance. Face-painting, Kim points out, has a longer tradition than mask-wearing. Therefore, he concludes, Korean mask dance can be understood as derived from Tibetan ritual and its concept of dancers as spirits.

This concept of the dancer as spirit, or 'ghost', is suggested in *Salpuri 9* through the use of the white face-paint. The notion that these dancers are representing phantoms is further implied by their costumes that consist of simple white shirts and trousers.<sup>v</sup> These clothes are also reminiscent of traditional Korean farmers' dress.



The movement vocabulary of this 'Remembering the war,' and the other three sections of the 'Bonpuri' part of *Salpuri 9*, consists of variations built upon a simple sequence of a small number of gestures or postures. For example, while kneeling on the platform, the *corps* of dancers repeatedly and rapidly turn and rock their upper bodies from one side to another and alternately sweep their arms over their heads. Occasionally they shuffle across the stage on their knees. Another, travelling movement, sees the dancers crawl across the platform in an upward facing 'crab-like' posture. Combined with this is a distinctive jump wherein the dancers bend forwards from the waist, let their arms and head flop to the floor, and execute a series of leaps. Two postures are also used frequently throughout the performance. First, the dancer adopts a triangular pose with the hands and feet on the floor and their hips raised. Second, in what resembles someone 'listening to the floor', the dancer rests on one shoulder with their head to one side while, as with the previous posture, the hips are raised in a triangular shape. This time, however, one leg is in an extended lunge position while the other assumes a bent-knee stance. This series of actions are sometimes performed in unison and, at other times, in smaller groups and even individually. Moreover, both the musical accompaniment and the choreography is fast, powerful and aggressive.

## II. 'Remembering the negotiation'.

This section begins with two female dancers sitting and hugging each other in the corner of the platform. One of the dancers stands and, sitting behind the first, puts her hands over her eyes and then touches her face. The 'blinded' dancer paws the air. The hands are removed and each dancer moves to the opposite corner of the platform. They

extend their arms towards each other. While they hold this position, other dancers either come on to the platform or stand by each side and copy this extended arm pose.

Is this, as the programme title suggests, Lee's interpretation of the negotiations between North and South Korea that took place either during the 1950s or the 1990s? If so, is Lee's criticism aimed towards the imperial powers that controlled the Panmunjeom Negotiations conducted by UN between 1950 and 1953 or, the army dictatorships that, during the 1990s, unwilling to resolve their differences. Either way, *sal*, is due to both North and South Korean governments and their continuing suspicion and stubbornness..

The critic, Yong-tae Kim (1993) interprets *Salpuri 9* as a sneering attack on the politics of South Korea.<sup>vi</sup> He adds that Lee depicts the negotiations as 'an old lady's anger which cannot reconcile different ideologies....' This seems conducive with Lee's own explanation of *Salpuri 9* as a work that expresses the people's, rather than the politicians, view of the Korean war and subsequent division.<sup>vii</sup>

According to the dance critic, Yeong-tae Kim (1993), the choreographer is no concerned with apportioning blame explores grief in terms of 'right or reflection not in terms of curses or damnation'.

### III. Recollection: Fleeing from the war.

The *corps*, each carrying a bundle, walk around the outside of the stage area in two single lines. They then climb onto the platform and, scattered across its surface, stand

still. Amongst them, a solo female dancer, taking tiny steps, wanders across the platform while the rest of the corps sit along the sides and turn away from her.

Another small group of dancers then appear at the back of the platform and, like the solo woman, travel in small steps. They then start to swing their bundles, place them on their heads, and then throw them to the floor. After this, the solo female dancer begins to dance. She travels with a small flat-footed shuffle similar to the gait of an old person and also common to much traditional Korean dance. At the same time, with her arms wrapped around the bundle, her upper body twists from side to side in a rapid twitching motion. She joins the rest of the dancers for the beginning of the next, and final, section.

#### IV: Salpuri.

This last part, 'Salpuri', is the shortest of the four central sequences. It begins with four dancers who, with their arms linked together, cross the platform in a 'zig-zag' path towards the front. While this is happening, other dancers climb onto the platform and, beginning with their bodies bent forwards at the waist, they execute a movement sequence similar to that performed at the beginning of the work that includes jumps, forwards stretches and a circular arm-swings. This simple sequence is repeated several times by the entire corps, each time, increasing in scale and aggressiveness until, for the last few repeats they make a sharp and loud 'ah' sound every time they stretch their arms towards the audience. The intensity and athleticism of the choreography reaches a peak, at which point all the dancers collapse to the floor. This sense of momentum towards a complete physical exhaustion is reminiscent of the activity of the 'possession'



shaman in traditional Korean dance where the performer repeatedly jumps in the air until communication with the spirits is achieved.

Duepuri: expulsion of the evil spirits.

Lee comes onto the platform carrying a big broomstick. As she sweeps the floor with the broom she brushes the members of the *corps* off the platform. Having cleared the platform she then stares out towards the audience as the lights slowly fade.

According to the choreographer (interview 21-06-2001), this conclusive and simple act is meant to symbolise removing the *sal* of the past in order to begin afresh. In traditional shaman dance, the performer takes on the character of the spirit to whom the audience pray to remove the *sal*. The audience, therefore has a vital active part in traditional shaman dance. Lee, however, re-interprets this notion and, as she explains, the action of praying is replaced by a more passive listening.

*Salpuri 9* is a work that, as has already been claimed, brings together elements from two very distinct dance vocabularies, each with their own socio-cultural background, philosophy and *raison d'être*: traditional Korean and western contemporary dance. The first has its origins in ritual, is usually performed 'in-the-round' and requires the active participation of the audience. The second, on the other hand, was developed at the beginning of the twentieth century in the west by a small group of pioneering female choreographers, is theatre-based and, therefore, contains little or no interactive dimension. The next section of this analysis will present an examination of both of these

vocabularies in relation to their contribution to the way in which *Salpuri 9* articulates meaning.

#### 5.4. Analysis of *Salpuri 9*.

According to Susan Leigh Foster (1986: 42), Martha Graham's choreography is a 'unified vehicle for expressing the self'. Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the Graham technique is the use of the contraction and the release of the torso. This gives the movement an intensity, angularity and sense of gravity that can be read as opposite to the more ethereal, lyrical and gravity-defying quality of classical ballet. For *Salpuri 9*, this 'heavy and angular' contemporary approach to movement, rather than a means of 'expressing the self' is used by Lee as a way of conveying group identity or communitarian consciousness. The contraction, instead of conveying a sense of individual torment or anguish, is used to articulate a more communal suffering and grief. In other words, Graham's original emphasis upon a solipsistic railing against the inhumanity of modern existence becomes, in *Salpuri 9*, a mass outcry against the invisible perpetrators of the Korean War.

Not only can *Salpuri 9* be read as work that draws heavily upon Graham technique but, as Odenthal (1998: 45) contends, it can also be understood as a specifically eastern re-interpretation of this western movement vocabulary. He states,

The Graham technique undergoes a highly interesting transformation. Performers' breath, meditation or non-movement and movements from Korean martial arts change Martha Graham Dance to become a language integrating- almost imperceptibly -traditional Korean movement form or body experiences.

A clear example of this integrated approach is the distinctive 'forward flop' gesture used throughout the choreography. While adopting this bent over stance the dancers either jump, turn, or swing their arms from side to side. Moreover, these jumps are executed with bent knees and relaxed feet. The atmosphere engendered by this posture is one of world-weariness and suffering. With the face almost hidden and the gaze turned down, it is also a posture that connotes an almost inhuman and indiscriminate mass consciousness. These, it suggests, are the faceless victims of conflict.

Other references to the 'downward' emphasis of Graham technique can be recognised in several other key aspects of the choreography of *Salpuri 9*. One of these is the 'foetal' position wherein the dancer sits and hugs their knees into their chest and hides their face. Another is a travelling action where the dancer remains on their knees and shuffles quickly across the dance area. As with the Graham technique, the close relationship with the earth is important in *Salpuri 9* as it symbolises not only a sense of being 'downtrodden' and suppressed but it also invokes a 'ground awareness' that is central to much traditional Korean dance. To this end, what the choreography of *Salpuri 9* seems to suggest is, rather than divergence, there is a sense of proximity between east and west and the traditional and the more contemporary.



According to the dance critic Chan-gil Lee (*Choom*, March 2001), in *Salpuri 9* the choreographer employs a contemporary Western dance vocabulary in order to develop Korean dance. The suggestion is that of a one-way dynamic. As is being suggested in this analysis, however, the relationship between East and West is more of a dialogic construction in that, by incorporating both traditional eastern dance elements with those drawn from more contemporary western sources, both of these two vocabularies are changed. The somewhat insular Graham technique seemingly gains a sense of communitarian consciousness while Korean dance benefits from a Graham-based intensity.

Another way in which *Salpuri 9* can be read as being dialogical in nature is the relationship between the spectator and the dancers. Throughout the work, for example, many of the performers, while they are not themselves dancing, observe what is happening. In this way, not only is the interactive structure of traditional shaman dance being invoked but the 'fourth-wall' of western theatre dance performance is destabilised. This breaking down the barrier between dancer and spectator is a frequently used mechanism in much contemporary dance in the west.<sup>viii</sup> It is often employed as a means of disrupting conventions associated with the passive spectator and active performer or a way of destroying the notion of theatre as some form of 'magical illusion'. It can also be a way of 'drawing the spectator' into the action and creating a closer and more intimate performance atmosphere. To this end, by using this device, not only can *Salpuri 9* be read as a work that breaks down boundaries between eastern traditional and western contemporary dance, but also one that emphasises the notion of experimentation as an important intercultural strategy.

### 5.5. Conclusion.

This analysis of Jung hee Lee's *Salpuri 9* has focused on a 'dialogical' reading of both eastern traditional and western contemporary dance vocabularies in a work that explores the difficulties faced by a post-war Korean populace. By adopting and adapting Adshead Lansdale's intertextual model to the reading of this dance work, several key factors have been identified.

First, rather than revealing differences between East and West and 'traditional' and 'contemporary', this analysis has revealed a great deal of similarity almost to the point where the rigidity of this form of polarity starts to destabilise. Second, not only are such dualisms destabilised but, due to the subject matter of the work, a further level of change takes place. A level of historical/geographic and cultural influence, previously removed from the east/west and traditional/contemporary dyads are, due to narrative forces, is reintroduced. *Salpuri 9* is a work that deals directly with the horrors of war. This level of specificity to historical events is, to some extent, the agent of destabilisation. To that end the intercultural 'fusion' of eastern and western elements, unlike that employed in *Kkocksin*, imbues some of the more gentle and restrained traditional gestures with a necessarily hard-edged aggression. In turn, proximity then makes the distance between what is traditional and what is contemporary and the line that separates east from west impossible to gauge.

Further to this notion of dance as an intercultural practice, what this work also seems to convey is not only the extent to which both eastern and western dance vocabularies can benefit (and, to some extent render problematic dualistic ideologies) through proximity but also, how, through their integration key commonalties can be revealed. For example, although this work is meant to be specific to the Korean War, its 'intercultural' approach to creating a movement vocabulary suggests that such social, geographical and historical specifics are merely consequential rather than determinate. In other words, conflict and suffering are universal and it is this that *Salpuri 9's* choreography conveys.

*Salpuri 9* is a didactic work in which the meaning articulated through the combined use of direct address and movement symbolism is unavoidably a denouncement of war and promotion of pacifism. Like Han's *Kkocksin*, Lee's *Salpuri 9* is preoccupied with the past, which is made manifest in the frequent appearance of 'ghosts' or 'spirits'. In neither work is there any sense of appeasement. The semi-guilt ridden and morally confused view of history articulated by *Kkocksin*, however, is stripped away in *Salpuri 9* to expose a legacy of accusation and National blame. Moreover, in both works, this pre-occupation with political propaganda transforms all the performers into little more than two-dimensional ciphers. Is this the only means through which a contemporary Korean dance culture is able to develop? Is it not possible to discover some aspect of traditional Korean culture that can not only be celebrated but might also provide a glimpse into what future Korean dance practice might look like? In order to address this concern the work analysed in the next chapter is Jeong-ho Nam's *Pallae* (1993).



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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Jung Hee Lee, 12/03/2001.

<sup>2</sup> *Kyoung Hyang*, Daily News, 22/11/1980.

<sup>3</sup> The North Korean Communists attacked South Korea across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel on 25/06/1950.

<sup>4</sup> These three titles, 'Auri', 'Bonpuri' and 'Duepuri' are specific to this analysis as a structural aid and are not original to the work itself.

<sup>5</sup> This use of white clothes to represent spirits can also be seen in the *ssikkim-kuk*, a ritual for consoling spirits on the Korean island of Jindo.

<sup>6</sup> 1993 program note to *Salpuri* 9.

<sup>7</sup> Personal interview 12/03/2001.

<sup>8</sup> For example, near the beginning of Pina Bausch's *Nelken (Carnations)* (1982) the dancers leave the stage area and enter the auditorium in order to directly address individual members of the audience.

## **Chapter Six.**

### **Intercultural interaction:**

**Jeong-ho Nam's *Pallae* ('Laundry') (1993).**

### 6.1. Introduction.

So far in this study, two dance works by twentieth-century Korean practitioners have been examined in detail. Of concern has been the extent to which they can be read as a post-colonial response to the need for a relevant and socially responsive Korean dance culture that, while demonstrating an intercultural sensitivity retains an indigenous integrity. The first of these, *Kkocksin* (Han, 1999) is an example of Korean Creative dance and is a fictional account of the experience of Korean women in a patriarchal society. The choreographic style of this work is based on elements of traditional Korean dance interpreted through a western theatrical 'filter'. Although this 'intercultural' methodology can be read as a clear demonstration of a much-needed post-colonial redevelopment of a previously undervalued indigenous performance legacy, as this study has shown, it is not without problems.

Implicit to much traditional Korean dance is a concept of gender that is essentialist and institutionally Patriarchal wherein the woman is an archetypally passive, frail and ultimately tragic victim. It is this somewhat romantic and oppressive stereotype of femininity that, it has been suggested, *Kkocksin* articulates. Due to this simplistic and regressive representational politics, the work seems 'out of touch' with more contemporary attitudes towards gender. Ultimately, the only voice of dissent that this work articulates belongs to the male soloist who is therefore favoured through the Patriarchal code. This notion of the man using choreography to express a sense of guilt and remorse reads as a somewhat disingenuous tactic. Although proclaiming a sense of injustice, in the end, the representation of women that this work articulates remains that



of the silent and passive victim and, as this study has argued, is not a viable means though which old-fashioned models of gender can be challenged.

In order to discover if these old fashioned Patriarchal gender codes are being elsewhere challenged in Korean dance practice the work that will be analysed in this chapter is Jeong-ho Nam's *Pallae* (1993). It is a dance for five women and explores the ways in which they interact while they are occupied with doing their laundry. Of concern will be to what extent this work can be read as a more optimistic and forward-looking contribution to the development of a relevant and socially responsive Korean dance culture. Moreover, as this is a work that deals specifically with the behavior of a small group of women away from the controlling influence of men, key will be in what ways some of the more stereotypical codes of gender representation articulated in other Korean dance works are here problematised.

To this end, after a brief discussion of Nams' contribution to 1980s Korean dance and a description of key movement and structural elements of the work, this analysis will address a number of specific concerns. First, set within a relevant gender discourse, the extent to which the work addresses the 'phallocentric configurations' (Carol Brown, 1996: 7) of 'traditional' Korean society will be discussed. Second, in what ways this can be interpreted according to a 'pro-feminist' challenge to some of the more orthodox, and patriarchal, codes of gender representation will be explored. Third, and set within a cross-cultural discourse on gender, of concern will be to what extent this work can be read as a uniquely Korean 'take' on issues surrounding the representation of women in dance and, moreover, how this corresponds to the development of a movement

vocabulary that, although intercultural in construction, retains an identifiable indigenous character.

## 6.2. Korean modern dance during the 1980s and Jeong-ho Nam.

According to the dance critic Yeong-tae Kim (2000), Nam's work is unique among other practitioners in South Korea. In contrast to the intense and oppressive atmosphere of most modern Korean dance, her work seems more uplifting and positive. This, Kim claims, is all the more remarkable as the dominant Korean modern dance technique is Graham, a style more commonly associated with the suffering of women whether it is characters taken from ancient mythology or more contemporary 'everywoman' figures. Furthermore, Graham practitioners in Korea, because they believe it to be both aesthetically and technically superior to more indigenous traditional forms, tend to adhere more rigidly to this western modern method than their European and American counterparts. The downside of this almost reverential approach to Graham is not only a tendency towards an inexpressive mechanism but also the subsequent devaluation of all other vocabularies, especially Korean ones.

This, Yeong-tae Kim (2000: 41) argues, is not the case with Nam. In contrast to the 'insensibility' of other Korean choreographers, he argues, Nam constructs 'quality [or 'depth'] of sense'. This sense of a non-creative atmosphere in the Korean dance field during the 1980s is elsewhere articulated by the dance critic Sun-yeol Lee.



When Nam started her work, the Korean dance field was very stagnant. It is true there was an increase in the number of dance performances and an abundance of external changes. Therefore some blind person called that time a 'renaissance of dance'. But the reality is that Korean dance works were shallow, did not digest the notion of dance and displayed crude, inexpert movements which were learned from the West. They did this rather than progress toward constructing their art themselves as choreographers or show their own colour.

(*Dance Forum* February 2000: 47, translation)

Elsewhere, Nam herself explains that, rather than trying to slavishly follow in the 'hallowed' footsteps of other choreographers, her main source of inspiration has always stemmed from the more ordinary activities of people's day to day existence. It is this adherence to a 'grass-roots' policy that has allowed her to avoid falling into a 'shallow' and 'derivative' choreographic style. What has also aided her, in this respect, has been her 'intercultural' background, rejection of more 'grandiose' subject matter and adaptation of technique to suit the theme of the specific work. She believes that, what is important is to know oneself as a choreographer/ dancer and then to find a dance that is good to oneself rather than a good dance technique.<sup>1</sup> She also adds that her early training contributed to her later desire to avoid what she considers to be excessively decorative, yet soulless, choreography. For her, such artificiality is like the 'strong make-up of ugly women'.<sup>2</sup>

She goes on to confess that her desire to choreograph does not stem from any burning ambition to cure the world's ills but rather, through a technique that draws from a wide range of different sources, 'make lovely dance pieces and dance which transcends reality and dream as an absorber of this life.'<sup>3</sup>



Nam graduated from Ewha Women's University in 1975. Following this she taught dance at a secondary school in her hometown of Pusan before moving to Paris. Here she trained as a dancer for three years and gained a DEA (an advanced degree) at the Rennes II University, a diploma of dance at the Sorbonne University and finally joined the Company de Jean-Gaudin as a dancer. Nam's technical background is in ballet, Graham and Limon technique. She is now a professor in the School of Dance in the Korean National University of Arts and the art director of the dance company KNUA. She has choreographed about thirty pieces and has written a book of essays entitled *Menbal-yae Terpsichore [Barefoot Terpsichore]* which is about her life and her dance.

The dance critic Chae-hyeon Kim (*Dance Forum*, February 2000) believes that Nam's dance works are easy to understand because of their clear subject matter and elemental dance vocabulary. He asserts that this clarity stems from her singular character and the strong dance training she gained in France. Kim also argues that Nam has a rational approach to choreography wherein she avoids excessive expression and rarely uses unnecessarily technically difficult movements. At the same time, however, her main motivation is, according to the dance critics Hee-wan Chae (programme note, 1999), Yeong-tae Kim (*Dance Forum*, February 2000) and Chae-hyeon Kim (*Dance Forum*, February 2000), play. Nam herself remarks,

All subjects around me can be my materials for choreography. I have endless curiosity about people. I think human beings are playful beings.

(Newspaper *Pusan Maeil Sinmun*, 29 November 1994)

This fascination with play, moreover, has remained a source of inspiration throughout the three main stages of her career as a dance practitioner. The first stage, from 1982 to 1985, according to the dance critic Yong-ku Park (1997), can be characterised according to a 'city sensibility'. In works such as *Diagonal Line* (1982) and *Play* (1984) there is no discernible narrative or message but, rather, an exploration of abstraction. Elsewhere, however, another critic Sun-yeol Lee (1997) claims that Nam's early work can be read as a satire on modern Korean society.

Nam's second stage, from 1985 to 1990, continued the theme of play. For example, in works such as *Balloon Heart* (1986) and *Go out Kids, go to Pick the Moon* (1987), the choreographer adopts a young Korean girl's viewpoint. According to Kim, Chae-hyeon (*Dance Forum*, February 2000) these works are based on Nam's own experience of childhood. He suggests, however, that beneath this veneer of innocence is a commentary upon gender inequality in Korea.

This concern with issues related to the social status of women in Korea reaches maturation in the third stage of her career, 1990 to the present. In works such as *Conversation* (1990) and *Gasiri* (1990) the subject matter is the exploration of women's psyche, their social behaviour and their relationships with men. Nam's ongoing concern with creating works out of the Korean woman's situation has, according to many dance critics, set her at the forefront of the modern dance movement in Korea. As Kyeong-ae Kim (2001: 123) remarks, 'due to Nam's efforts, the range of creative modern dance has been widened, and more and more dancers regard the new spirit of playfulness and satire in dance as a sign of their creativity.'

It is this 'creative' combination of 'playfulness and satire' that also characterizes *Pallae*, a work in which, it will be suggested, Nam's individual approach to both modern and more traditional dance can be read as an example of an intercultural, yet simultaneously uniquely Korean, choreographic practice.

### 6.3. Structure of *Pallae*.

The curtain rises to reveal five female dancers wearing many layers of white clothes sitting in a circle in the middle of the stage. Each dancer has an upturned washing tub covered with a white folded sheet. In the corner of the stage is a small well.<sup>4</sup> As Kyeong-ae Kim (2001: 132) describes,

the whole first floor of the auditorium is used as a stage, and the second and third floors are for the audience. Because of this setting, the audience looks down on the dancers from a high vantage point. The amphitheatre-style stage is a room only for women. In this space, women can leave their cares behind and engage in a womanly fellowship. Women at the well play together, and sometimes they fight with one another. The well is a small, enclosed society, and Nam tells of the life which can be felt there.

According to Kim, the impression is that these women are gossiping at a village well on a moonlit night. She also observes that 'these women have a gripe; they are tired of waiting until late at night for their husbands or partner to come home'.<sup>5</sup> Nam, however, explains that, rather than being impatient for the return of their men, these women are merely bored with their uneventful lives. She remarks,



Women who gather around the well in the middle of the night enjoy the act of waiting itself without waiting for anything in particular. They wash and dry their clothes to dispel their boredom. These women get absorbed in playing among themselves with nothing but their laundry bucket, through mimicking their childhood, competing with each other, but eventually returning themselves to their fate.

(Programme note for World Dance 2000, translation)

The extent to which this notion of *ennui* is articulated in the work, and how this can be read as a comment upon the desire for emancipation and the notion of the women-only space as a site for the articulation of a femininity elsewhere suppressed, will be explored in the next section of this analysis.

For the purposes of this analysis the work will be divided into five shorter sections:

'Drumming', 'Washing', 'Bathing', 'Playing' and 'Exeunt'. Key aspects of the choreography and other elements of the performance will be both described and interpreted as they correspond to three important issues. First, how they can be read as a non-hierarchical blending of both Korean traditional and western modern dance practice. Second, by engaging with a wider contemporary discourse on femininity, to what extent the work articulates a model of femininity that challenges more stereotypical gender codes deployed elsewhere in Korean modern dance. Third, how both this specific 'take' on interculturalism as a performance ethos combined with a pro-feminist representational policy can be read as contributing to the development of a forward-looking and pro-active Korean dance culture.

i. 'Drumming'.

This first section begins with all five dancers sat in a circle in a pool of light with the rest of the stage in darkness. In front of each dancer there is what, at first, seems to be a washing tub. Each of these tubs is a different size and on top of each one is a folded sheet. As the pre-recorded drumming music begins, one of the women pretends to copy its gentle rhythm by tapping her tub. As the music increases in volume the other women join in with this 'play' drumming. Two of the women then stand and, while holding a large sheet, perform a sequence of sideways jumping steps. One of the two women then pulls the sheet away from the other and, holding it over her shoulder like a cape, drags it back to the circle and leaves it in a pile in the centre. The other three women stop their drumming, stand up and, picking up their tubs, either roll them across the stage or walk around the circle while continuing to drum. It is this section of the choreography that sees the metamorphosis of the washing tub into a modified version of a *buk*, a traditional Korean drum.

As with most of her dance works, Nam includes commonplace items that, throughout the choreography take on symbolic import. According to Chae (programme note for Nam's 1997 work, *I was Dancing in My Dream*), Nam's use of stage properties in her dance works constitutes a 'fetishism of daily objects'. In *Pallae*, for example, Nam's use of a Korean traditional *buk* as a washing tub constitutes an inversionary tactic wherein an object symbolic of women's work is turned over to become a means of entertainment. The drum not only becomes the focus of the choreography but, symbolic of 'play' a vehicle of expression and freedom. As such, Nam deconstructs the primary

symbolic code associated with the washing tub, that of women's labour and relative servility. Moreover, and according to Chae (1985), in traditional Korean society, labourers would often try to alleviate the physical hardship and drudgery of their work through singing and playing games and it is this nostalgic imagery that Nam conjures and satirises in *Pallae*.

ii. 'Washing'.

This second section of *Pallae* sees the development of the choreography with the women executing a sequence of drumming, falling back, standing up and balancing their folded washing on their heads. As with all the choreography in this work, intricate footwork is given a lower priority to the rhythmic use of the arms, hands and torso. The step-patterns are used merely to support upper-body gestures. It is this emphasis on rhythm rather than precise technique that sees Nam's allegiance more with traditional Korean forms such as *salpuri ch'um* and shaman dance rather than with non-indigenous techniques. This section also sees the development of the more mundane activity of washing into a means of physical expression.

Halfway through 'washing' the women also remove their jackets to reveal plain white sleeveless shirts. These jackets are then dunked into the washing tubs as though they are being washed. This activity develops as the women then drop the jackets completely into the tubs and proceed to stamp and jump on them. Having completed this lively 'washing' choreography they remove the jackets from the tubs and proceed to swing them round their heads while dancing around the stage area as though trying to get them



dry. The final sequence of this section involves the women either piling some of the tubs on top of each other and then standing on the top or placing a single tub on their head and returning to the circle.

Once again, a simple gesture of washing their jackets takes on symbolic import. By stamping their clothes underfoot and then swinging them over their heads, the sense that something previously repressed is gradually being released is being suggested.

Moreover, this sense of 'emancipation' is taken one step further in the next section.

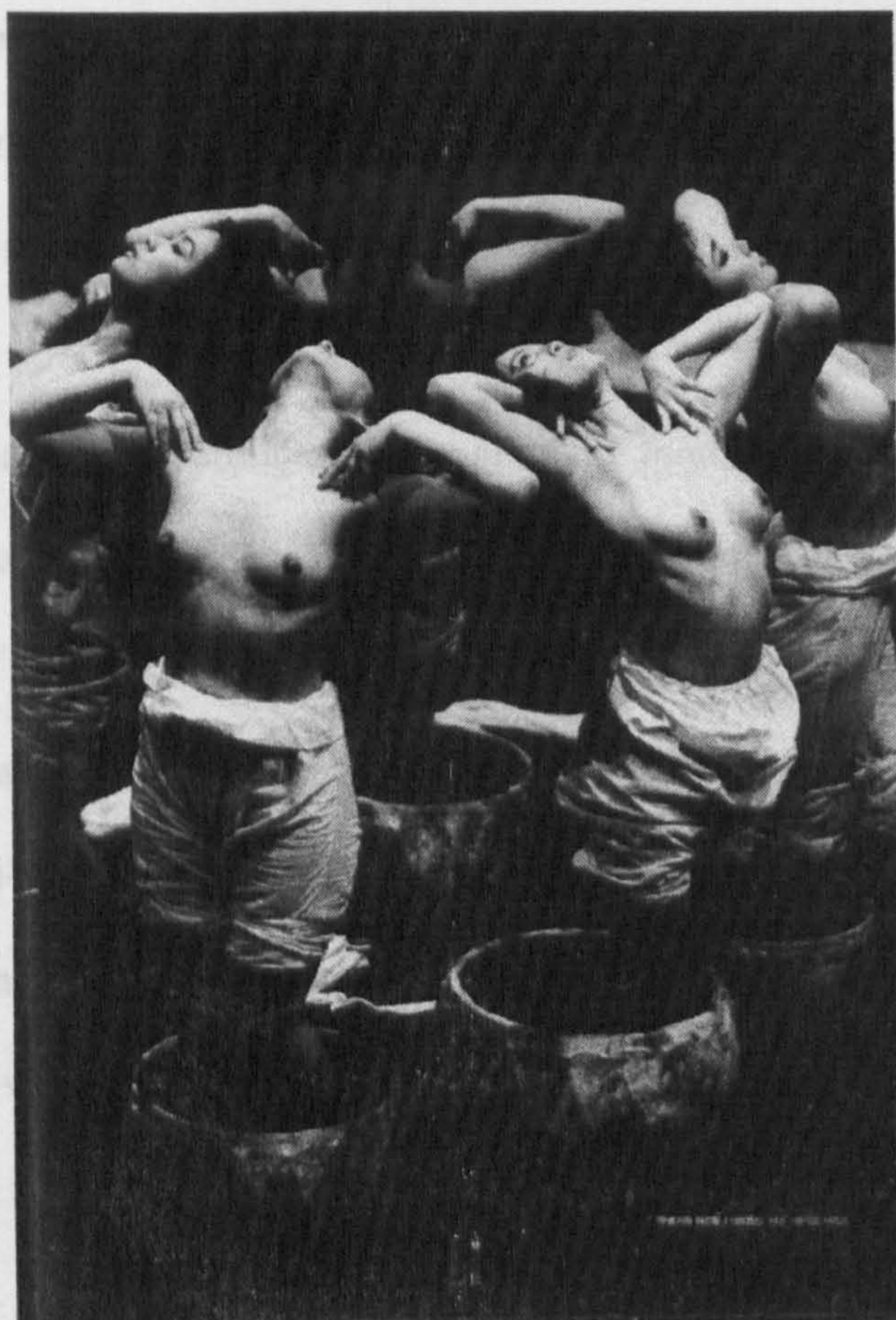


Figure 9: Nam's *Pallae*.



iii. 'bathing'.

The start of the next section, 'bathing', sees the women stand in their tubs and remove the sleeveless shirt, leaving them topless. The choreography becomes more intimate with the five women stroking their own hair and faces. This develops as the women wet their faces and splash each other with the water from the well and bend their heads over into their tubs as though washing their hair. While they are doing this they also step from one upturned tub to another. According to the dance critic Yeong-tae Kim, (*Dance Forum*, February 2000), the women's action of washing their faces can be interpreted as a sign they are preparing themselves for the return of their men. He also claims that the hair-stroking gesture symbolizes female loneliness while the action of putting their heads into the tubs suggests the history of women who are exhausted by waiting.

Kim's interpretation of the choreography suggests the mood of the dance to be somewhat sombre and depressing. Contrary to Kim's reading, the atmosphere throughout most of the dance is upbeat and frequently comic. The suggestion is that Kim, in his commentary, is only able to interpret the behavior of these women according to an old-fashioned patriarchal code that maintains that, without their men, women must be lonely and frustrated. There is no space within Kim's interpretation for the possibility that women can not only exist but also even express and celebrate their individuality.

In contrast to Kim's somewhat miserable reading of this section of *Pallae*, what is suggested is the development of a more intimate and powerful bond between these

women. The removal of clothing reveals not only bare flesh but symbolises the articulation of deeper emotional qualities, a process that, the work implies, might not be possible while under the scrutiny of the regulatory male gaze.

During this section the tubs once again undergo a process of metamorphosis, this time becoming stepping stones over an imaginary river. The notion of a river is further emphasised by the quiet sound of tricking water. In the Korean countryside small stepping-stones are often used to cross even shallow rivers so as to avoid getting the feet wet. These are called *Jingeomdari*. These little stones, that seem to have more of a decorative or ornamental rather than simply practical function, are also closely associated with picnics and outdoor play. Alongside this somewhat romantic symbolism, however, this notion of the stepping stones takes on another meaning.

Using washing tubs as a means of crossing a river suggests a further inversion of an object that denotes female suppression and drudgery to that of emancipation and escape. That these women are semi-naked also implies a journey from innocence to experience or even of adolescence to womanhood.

Perhaps one of the most striking and symbolically loaded sequences in the work sees four of the women carry the fifth and carefully drop her head into one of the tubs. As if to underline the importance of this gesture in the choreography it happens twice. On one level it can simply be read as a highly stylized and somewhat comical method of washing hair. Set within the context of an exploration both women's sexuality and social interaction, however, this gesture takes on a much more profound meaning as a



form of baptism where, perhaps, one of the youngest or newest members of the group undergoes a form of initiation. Continuing this religious theme, it could also be read as a ritual that is meant to wash away sin or even constitute a rebirth.

iv. 'playing'.

The end of 'bathing' and the introduction of 'playing' is marked by the women putting some of their clothes back on and pushing the tubs across the stage with their heads.

This fourth section also sees some of the most acrobatic and comical choreography in the work with the women either performing headstands in their tubs while pedaling their legs in the air as if they were riding bicycles or putting tubs on their heads and wandering around the stage. While one dancer balances her tub on her head and rotates it another performs a series of cartwheels. Once again the tubs are used as stepping stones but this time they also manage to stand on the tubs and, by using their feet, make the tubs shift across the floor.

The section starts in complete silence but, about halfway through, a lively percussive accompaniment begins. To this music the women begin to incorporate martial arts kicks and a jumping step called *jabandolgi* into the choreography. This step, in which the dancer executes a series of turning leaps in a circle, is taken from a traditional Korean farmer's dance. The atmosphere invoked through the choreography is a further extension of the 'playfulness' of the previous parts of the work. The suggestion is that, at this point, all interest in doing the laundry and therefore conforming to a Patriarchal model of female servitude is abandoned in favour of a more individual expressive

physical discourse. This highly energetic activity, however, is short-lived, the suggestion being that, ultimately, these women must return to their proscribed roles.

v. 'exeunt.'

In the final part of *Pallae*, 'exeunt', the tempo of the music increases yet the dancers' movements remain slow with the women balancing their laundry on their heads and gracefully walking off. This contrast between a lively accompaniment and gentle activity is commonly associated with shaman performance wherein the *yang* of the music creates a harmonic balance with the *yin* of the choreography. This sense of sound and movement energy balancing each other in *Pallae* differentiates this work from other Korean modern dance work wherein, following a western tradition, both music and dance generate the same amount of energy.

This brief discussion of aspects of the choreography in the five sections of *Pallae* reveal several key points concerning structure, the relationship between the structure and the choreography and how this can be read as contributing to this work as an expression of feminine identity and sexuality. Most significant, perhaps, is the ways through which various elements *Pallae* emphasise the notion of a 'hidden' female kinesphere. This includes the initial image of the women sat in a small, faintly lit circle with their backs turned to the outside world as well as the process of disrobing and then putting their clothes on before the end of the performance.

The common theme that links structure, use of properties, choreography and subject matter together in *Pallae* is the image of the circle. The circular dance steps performed by the women either round the well or their washing tubs as they articulate and explore an intimate feminine kinesphere. On this notion of *Pallae* as an exploration of a secret female communality, the critic Kyeong-ae Kim (2001: 132) remarks,

At first, their faces have no expression other than a common weary look. They quickly become close after they find out that they share a common problem. They beat laundry baskets, jump and play around the well and take a bath. Sometimes they quarrel but they reconcile and thoroughly enjoy themselves before returning to their homes. This work portrays the full range of women's emotions using the setting of the well as the organizing, common element.

Another dance critic, Hee-wan Chae, elsewhere lends his own interpretation of the link between structure and subject matter. Nam's dance works, he contends, resemble 'a chain of mountains' in that they are progressive rather than recapitulative in structure.<sup>6</sup> He adds that they rarely have any dramatic conclusion but, rather, tend to build towards a spectacular central climax before coming to a gentle end. For *Pallae*, the climax is the sequence where the women remove their tops and expose their breasts, an action that, for middle-class conservative theatre-going Koreans would be considered shocking. This display of nudity, however, is not the end of the work as the dancers get dressed again before continuing with their dancing.



This notion of a gradual build followed by gentle conclusion differentiates Nam's work from that of other contemporary Korean choreographers where the common practice is to have the dramatic or emotional climax at the end. In contrast, Nam seems to be more influenced by a traditional strategy that, elsewhere in Korean dance circles, is slowly disappearing. In particular, *Pallae*'s circular and fluidic structure seems to emulate that of *Kangkangsuwolae*, a traditional Korean folk dance that is performed only by women. More than just in terms of structure, *Pallae* can also be read as a modern theatre-based interpretation of many of the characteristics of this particular folk dance.

The choreography of *Kangkangsuwolae* consists primarily of gentle walking and hopping steps that are executed while the women hold hands and travel in a series of intertwining circles and spiral shapes. All the women wear long white dresses and the performance traditionally takes place on throughout the night of the full moon in January. According to Yeol-kyu Kim (in Chae, 2000: 51) the dance has a strong ritualistic essence and symbolic import wherein the movement of the dancers is meant to represent the tying and untying of knots. He goes on to explain that, while the tying of knots is meant to symbolise 'happiness' and 'life', the untying invokes 'sadness' and 'death'. While *Pallae* bears a striking resemblance to much of *Kangkangsuwolae*, however, it does not pursue this life/death theme. Instead, this folk-based concept of an intimate and secret female communality is manipulated in *Pallae* in order to address many issues that surround gender representation not only as they correspond to dance but also as they are being raised elsewhere in much contemporary feminist discourse.

#### 6.4. *Pallae*, phallocentric configuration and female representation.

The major difficulty with addressing representations of femininity in Korean dance is the chronic lack of an established and indigenous feminist dance scholarship. The majority of criticism and dance theory in Korea is not only written by men but also demonstrates a reluctance to move away either from the security of a formalist model or a patriarchal conception of gender. The result of this has been a profound silence around the subject of female representation and sexuality in Korean dance work. A network of social forces has further contributed to this predicament wherein a sense of discomfort in discussing issues related to female sexuality is matched by a fear of trespassing into an 'occluded' arena unknown to mainstream 'visible' patriarchy.

The few critics who do attempt to explore this 'taboo' subject are faced with three major obstacles. First, a lack of any alternative to an old-fashioned relativistic gender discourse wherein women are the essential marginalised 'other' to an institutional masculine norm. Second, a patriarchal system that is ill equipped to cope with a more pluralistic approach to articulating meaning. Third, a lack of supportive indigenous feminist discourse that, in turn, necessitates a heavy reliance on western thinking. This runs the risk of cultural oversight wherein matters related to national difference are subsumed under an assumed western norm.

To this end, any discussion of female representation in Korean dance needs to take these three problems on board. What is needed is a framework that, on the one hand, does not support an old-fashioned rhetoric of gender differentiation and, on the other, is sensitive

enough to account for notions of difference within femininity rather than merely between an assumed universal model and its necessary masculine 'other'.

On this notion of a critical sensitivity towards female representation, Judith Butler (1990: 3) writes,

The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally, often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination.

In other words, she argues, the 'singular notion of identity is a misnomer' (p.4).

Accordingly, no representation of femininity can be understood free from the socio-historical, cultural, geographical and political frameworks in which it operates and through which it is articulated. Moreover, this notion of a multiplicity, although deconstructionist in nature, does not assume a continuous deferment of meaning but, rather, retains the provision to illuminate the otherwise invisible mechanisms of gender coding. At the same time, it allows for a multiplicity that, in itself, problematises the need to read feminism according to a rhetoric of 'otherness'. It is this difference as 'pure' difference that, it will be argued, *Pallae* articulates and through which the work can be read as a possible intercultural antidote to the phallogentric configuration of Korea's colonial heritage.



One of Butler's main criticisms is of what she sees as an old-fashioned, yet tenacious, image of 'women's common subjugated experience' (p.4). This inspires her to ask, 'is there a specificity to woman's cultures that is independent of their subordination by hegemonic, masculinist cultures?' Moreover, she adds, 'is there a region of the "specifically feminine", one that is both differentiated from the masculine as such and recognisable in its difference by an unmarked and, hence, presumed universality of "women" '? In other words, is it possible to imagine a concept of femininity that is not just identifiable as the (poorer) axiomatic opposite to masculinity and is thus weighed down by all the cultural and social baggage that such a dyad entails?

In Han's *Kkocksin*, it was argued, woman remains the silent and passive victim within a social network in which only men have a voice and therefore power. Indeed, it is almost ironic that a work that is supposed to be an exploration of the Korean woman's psyche concludes with their absence. In contrast to this *misérabiliste* concept, in *Pallae*, there is no investment in any notion of women as victim. In fact, such dualistic and stereotypical gender codes are constantly destabilised throughout the work. Rather, and as the frequent shifting between melancholia, playfulness and eroticism suggest, women are represented as emotionally complex and independent.

Female sexuality, as it is articulated in *Pallae*, does not derive its meaning through associations with procreation, wherein the woman is merely a passive receptacle within a phallogentric (and hence highly localised) matrix. Rather it is the notion of pleasure and a more holistic eroticism that *Pallae* explores. Indeed the whole notion of the woman as 'hollow vessel' is humorously turned on its head through the symbolic

association between the female body and the *buk*. In *Pallae*, the female body, through comic inversion and communal erotic play, takes on more than its culturally proscribed level of meaning. To this end, the body in *Pallae* can be read as it corresponds to the theoretical 'body' that Butler (1990: 8) elsewhere describes. She explains,

'the body' appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself. . . . But 'the body' is itself a construction, as are the myriad 'bodies' that constituted the domain of gendered subjects.

Elsewhere, Joseph Bristow (1997: 1) explores the notion of sexuality as an agent through which the dualistic parameters of cultural codification can be problematised. He suggests that sexuality 'points to both internal and external phenomena, to both the realm of the psyche and material world.' He goes on to contend that more old-fashioned notions of sexuality as being defined through procreative activity are rapidly being replaced by broader, more fluidic and transitive meanings. In other words, a masculine will to sexual domination is slowly being eroded by differences within sexual activity and self-identification. According to Bristow (1997), although sexuality cannot exist without sexed bodies, these bodies are now recognised as coming in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and colours. Rather than a mechanism of control, he adds, sexuality is now the intersection of pleasure and physiology. In *Pallae*, it is the highly visible female body that becomes the site for this 'intersection.'

## 6.5. Conclusion.

As has been suggested in this analysis, *Pallae* is a work in which patriarchal notions of female sexuality as passive 'other' to a masculine norm is problematised. The articulation of a fluid, pleasure-oriented, holistic and communal sexuality, however, can, it seems only be revealed fleetingly in a 'secret' place: the washing well.

In this respect, to what extent does *Pallae* give 'legitimacy' and visibility to what mainstream culture regards as illicit and prefers not to discuss? One of the main concerns expressed in the analyses of the previous two works in this Part (Han's *Kkocksin* and Lee's *Salpuri 9*) is a tendency towards didacticism and propaganda. This use of dance as a political vehicle and the performers as two-dimensional ciphers, it was argued, does little to develop the intercultural dimension of Korean dance culture for two reasons. One, an almost obsessive concern with the past and second, the use of dance as a means of 'teaching'. As such, it was suggested, both works can be read as supportive of an old-fashioned masculine will to power wherein the audience is 'bent' towards, and expected to share in, a pre-meditated and unified concern. In *Pallae*, however, this ideological concern is replaced with what could be comparatively understood as a feminine aesthetic. Accordingly, notions of dance as a medium for education and a platform for political rhetoric are, in this work, supplanted by a more gently persuasive, indirect and polymorphous concept.

This shift from (old-fashioned and naïve) didacticism to more socially relevant and subtle articulations of gender identity not only destabilises post-colonial representational



politics but also points to a notion of identity wherein expression is read through but not controlled by forces of national/gender/social difference. In other words, difference is no longer understood according to fixed polarities but, rather, as they continually shift within a complex cultural/social/racial/political/geographic/historical matrix.

The next Part of this thesis will present an analysis of eight further dance works. Of concern in the three chapters is to what extent shifts in political belief, performers racial orientation, choreographic influence and/or geography impacted upon the development of an 'intercultural' approach to theatre dance performance.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in interview for the newspaper *Sport Chosun*, 11/03/1993.

<sup>2</sup> Interview, 03/2001.

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview, 10/03/2001.

<sup>4</sup> This description is based on the live performance and video recording of a performance of *Pallae* that took place in March 1993 at the Art Centre Jayou Theatre.

<sup>5</sup> In traditional Korean society, the men might stay part of the week in the first wife's house (or part of the house) and part of the week (or night) with another wife. But only one woman (the 'first wife') was a wife in a legal sense.

<sup>6</sup> See programme note of *I am dancing in my dream*, 1997

**Part Three.**

**INTERCULTURAL PRACTICE AND DEVELOPMENT.**



### Introduction to Part Three.

In the previous part of this study three dance works were read according to the intertextual model of analysis detailed by Adshead-Lansdale. Han's *Kkocksin*, Lee's *Salpuri 9* and Nam's *Pallae* were chosen as representative of the differences in approach to choreography in late twentieth century Korea. The unifying concern in this part of the investigation was to what extent, and in what ways, these three works could be read as contributing to the development of a socially responsive intercultural dance practice that retains an indigenous integrity.

Findings drawn from these analyses suggest that it is not enough to simply criticise or bemoan the existing situation but, rather, use qualities unique to dance in order to imagine possible solutions. To that end, much of each analysis was devoted to examining the extent to which both traditional Korean and more modern western dance codes were incorporated into the movement vocabulary of each work and what impact their proximity had on the symbolic import of the performance.

Part Two concluded with the suggestion that, contrary to any notion of a single and set model of 'intercultural' practice, there is a whole range of different interpretations. Moreover, as the findings of each analysis implied, the efficacy of these models is contingent upon a number of key factors. These include the way in which gender is represented, the relationship between polemic and aesthetic concerns and the tenor of the conclusion. For example, one of the main concerns in the analysis of Hans' *Kkocksin* was the way in which it represented women as silent, passive and ultimately

tragic victims of man's oppression. This model, highly reminiscent of much early western feminist polemic, does little to disrupt traditional gender constructs, and, to some extent, can even be argued as supportive of them. It is ironic, perhaps, that a contemporary western movement vocabulary, that can be traced back to the groundbreaking, anti-institutional and celebratory work of certain western pioneering female choreographers, is utilised in a work that seems more concerned with expressing a man's rather than a woman's frustration at the gender imbalance. In conclusion it was argued that using dance as man's apology to women rather than a direct call for change can do little to contribute to the development of an intercultural model of contemporary Korean dance. Moreover, it shifts attention away from those who, elsewhere in Korean society, are still struggling to find a voice and a level of independence.

The response to this finding was to ask whether it is possible to utilise indigenous traditional dance codes without, at the same time, invoking much of the old-fashioned and highly problematic ideology that supports and surrounds them. At the same time, it was argued, more attention must also be given to what impact the 'fusion' of the traditional with the modern, and the indigenous with the foreign has upon the ways in which contemporary Korean dance practice can be read as a challenge to Eurocentrism. Further, what must also be addressed is the extent to which the relationship between political motivation and aesthetic concerns has upon interpreting dance according to an 'intercultural' model.

This was the main concern in the analysis of Jung-hee Lee's *Salpuri 9* in Chapter Five, a didactic work that addresses the impact of the Korean War and the subsequent National division.

The analysis was focused on the ways in which Lee uses elements of both eastern traditional and western contemporary dance vocabularies in order to explore the difficulties faced by a post-war Korean populace. Rather than emphasising differences between East and West, and the traditional and the contemporary, many similarities were uncovered in the analysis to the point where an ideological model of a polar division lost cohesion. Furthermore, it was suggested, what the reading of this work revealed is not only the extent to which both eastern and western dance vocabularies can benefit through proximity but also how, through their integration, further commonalties can be discovered. For example, although this work is concerned with the Korean War, its 'fusion' of movement codes suggests that such social, geographical and historical specifics are consequential rather than determinate. In other words, conflict and suffering are universal and it is this that *Salpuri 9's* choreography conveys.

The political message of this work is unambiguous. As an emotional response to war, it wears its heart on its sleeve. While the use of dance as a propaganda vehicle is not unusual in Korea, the risk is that, as the analysis suggested, qualities unique to dance are sacrificed in order to convey a specific message. In other words, creativity takes second place to symbolic import: the conclusive result of which can sometimes see choreography devolve into mime. It is perhaps significant that the final image of *Salpuri*



9 is of a lone female who remains motionless and silent on the stage. Expressivity, in the end, is lost for the sake of accusation.

Both *Kkocksin* and *Salpuri 9* are works that deal with important events in Korean history while, at the same time, try to accommodate dance codes that are ideologically, culturally and historically very different. In addition, both works seem pre-occupied with bending the spectator to a specific political will. In *Kkocksin*, for example, the self-chastisement of the lone male dancer reads as a bizarre perversion of a 'Jesus complex,' wherein one person willingly takes on the blame and suffers for society's sin. Similarly, in *Salpuri 9*, the final unwavering stare of the female narrator towards the audience seems to suggest that something must be learned and that all costs, the function of the dance work is to educate and inspire people to change. The response to such manipulation is to ask: is this the direction that an intercultural dance practice needs to pursue? Is there not, perhaps, a less alienating alternative?

The work examined in Chapter Six was Nam's *Pallae*. In contrast to the overt political impetus and desire to engage with major events in Korean history, this dance work explores the intimate and secret interaction between a group of women around a washing hole. The work, it was suggested, can be read as a deconstruction of an ideological model of passive and demure female sexuality that is solely preoccupied with fulfilling the needs of men. In this respect, it was argued, the vocabulary of dance becomes the most suitable vehicle through which to explore this alternate reading of femininity. Dance, by its very nature eludes codification according to existing models are constructed within and determined by (Patriarchal) linguistic codes.

In the choreography of *Pallae* the unity of the subject of the female gender is problematised. In its place, the work articulates a notion of femininity as a sexual identity that does not require a phallic 'other' to make it both coherent and legitimate. Furthermore, such articulations not only destabilise the dichotomous construction of post-colonial representational politics but they also point to a notion of identity wherein expression is read through, but not controlled by, forces of national/gender/social difference. In other words, difference is no longer understood according to a dualistic either/or philosophy but as *pure* difference.

In conclusion, it was argued that *Pallae*'s correspondence to a post-feminist understanding of 'difference', is the means through which it can be read as a model of intercultural practice most useful to this study. Not only is the invisible hierarchy between traditional indigenous and modern western dance codes destabilised, but alongside that, an overt and simplistic didacticism that, in its need for 'truth,' risks alienating the spectator is rejected. In place of this is an intimate and suggestive exploration of human interaction outside patriarchal control. The suggestion is, in *Pallae*, although these institutional codes exist and may never be completely destabilised they are not all-defining and all-controlling. *Pallae* offers a secret and momentary glimpse into what an intercultural identity politics might look like.

The three chapters that constitute this Part Three present an analysis of eight more dance works. In Chapter Seven, three works will be discussed that, as part of the National Dance Movement, explore significant events in Korean history through the use of traditional dance codes. In Chapter Eight, three dance works based on western

techniques will be examined while, in Chapter Nine, two further works choreographed in England will be analysed.

In all three chapters a comparative procedure will be pursued. To that end, and due to a connection with Korean National Dance, the three works in Chapter Seven will be read as they compare and contrast to Hans' *Kkocksin*. A similar strategy will be used in Chapter Eight wherein, due to a similar approach to the use of non-indigenous dance forms, Lee's *Salpuri 9* will be the comparative work. Finally, in Chapter Nine, and because of a mutual concern with the exploration of differences within female representation, the two works will be viewed alongside *Pallae*.

As the dance works in this Part Three are all taken from my own canon, certain key factors must be taken into consideration. First, the impetus behind the creation of these works was not a remedial response to some imagined problematic status of Korean dance culture. Such an overtly curative directive has never been of interest as, ultimately, it imposes too great a limitation upon creativity and, ultimately, becomes an empty goal. The comparative strategy of this study is also not meant as a way of merely indicating where other choreographers may have 'gone wrong' as this also implies that they all share a similar intention. Moreover, it risks imposing a hierarchy that, as has already been suggested, runs contrary to the deconstructive aims of this study. Rather, the reading of all the dance works according to an 'intercultural' directive is something contained by this exposition. Ultimately, at the end of the process of analysis, these dance works still exist in their own right.



The second key factor that needs clarification relates to the relationship between the creator of the dance work and the analyst when both are the same person. There is an unavoidable limitation to a writer's discussion of her own work when it does not enjoy the support of the opinions of others. As the dance ethnographer Deidre Sklar (2000: 71) points out, it has been traditional practice to maintain a distance between self and the text being analysed. She suggests, however, that personal experience is being more widely recognised as contributory to the process of interpretation. To that end, of concern in the next part of this study is maintaining a critical distance while at the same time recognising that personal involvement in the choreographic process as a basis for meaning should not be ignored. In other words, no differentiation between the 'creative' impulse behind the choreographic process and the 'search for meaning' directive of the research will be attempted: practice and theory are understood not so much as existing in a dialogical relationship but, rather one and the same.

## **Chapter Seven.**

**Reading twentieth century Korean culture  
through the lens of traditional dance practice:  
An analysis of three National Dance works.**

### 7.1. Introduction.

This Chapter Seven presents an overview of three dance works in which most of the choreographic material is taken from traditional Korean dance practice. All three works, *For My Country, For My Dance* (1987), *My Love Korea* (1989) and *My Love Korea II* (1990) were performed while I was living in Korea and all of them address important events in its recent history. Of concern in this chapter, therefore, is the extent to which these works can be read as contributing to the ongoing development of a relevant and socially responsive contemporary Korean dance culture. Moreover, what will be investigated is in what ways the works, through a combination of traditional eastern and modern western material, demonstrate an intercultural sensitivity while retaining an indigenous integrity.

All three dance works were choreographed while I was a member of the Korean National Dance movement, the underlying ethos of which is the rejection of what is seen as the erosion of an indigenous dance culture due to a widespread influx of western dance techniques. Under the banner of the KND I created two dance companies: *Buleem* (a term taken from traditional mask dance that translates roughly as 'bring the music') and *Dideem* (which means 'stepping stone'). The dancers in *Buleem* are taken from the graduate department of dance at Ewha Women's University who trained in ballet and modern dance as well as in various Korean dance forms. The members of *Dideem*, on the other hand, are drawn from the dance departments of several Korean Universities who all specialise in various indigenous dance styles. Most of the performances by these two companies comprise of agit-prop 'street-theatre' pieces as part of



demonstrations and marches. Once a year, however, and usually for the premiere of a new work, both companies move into theatres. It is these theatre-based performances that will be used as the basis for the analyses.

The predominant performance methodology during this period with the National Dance Movement was to address issues relevant to Korea by using a predominantly traditional dance vocabulary. In that way, it was believed, an indigenous dance culture could be nurtured that would also see the preservation of its traditional legacy. The three works examined in this chapter follow this tactic. In this respect, my working practice closely resembles that of Sang-gun Han whose work, *Kkocksin* (1999) was analysed in Chapter Four. To this end, a comparative strategy will be employed wherein both similarities and differences between working procedures, and how this impacts upon the way in which issues are represented, will be considered.

## 7.2. *For My Country, For My Dance* (1987).

*For My Country, For My Dance* (1987) was first created for the Dance Company *Buleem* and uses four main classically trained female dancers, a corps of six male dancers (who specialise in 'breakdance'), four percussionists playing Korean drums and two synthesiser players.

The subject matter of this work is the 1980 *Kwangju* Massacre that caused the deaths of many hundreds of Korean pro-democracy demonstrators and innocent bystanders.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, this work was performed during a time when the military government tried

to cover up their involvement by imposed a widespread ban on any subsequent investigation.

*For My Country, For My Dance* is in three parts. The first part, 'Muemu', is based on a Korean myth that tells of how a monk called *Wonhyo* performed a dance as a way of ridding society of evil.<sup>2</sup> In *For My Country...*, this part is a duet for two women that explores their mutual love in an imaginary 'perfect' world. Much of the choreography for this duet is based upon gestures that suggest their dependence upon each other. For example, while linking hands both dancers lean outwards and turn in circles. Another gestures sees them, once again holding hands, slowly sink to the floor and raise themselves up again. Throughout the duet, the closeness of relationship is further enhanced through their continual eye contact. There is very little in the choreography that would categorise it as belonging to any specific movement vocabulary. Key to this duet was that their dancing shows no obvious sign of being regulated through codification. Rather, the emphasis is on more 'natural movements' that could depict images of women free from the 'poisonous' influence of institutionalisation.

The second part is called *Chungsang* ('young widow') and consists of two contrasting scenes. The first depicts the killings at the *Kwangju* massacre while the second concerns a young widow's grief over the loss of her husband and child. It is in the first scene where the 'breakdancing' skills of the male dancers are used in order to represent the emotionless, almost robotic, way in which the military authority brutally dealt with the protestors. Synthesisers and Korean drums are used to recreate the sound of automatic rifle fire and provide an atmosphere of fear and confusion.



The subsequent dance of the young widow sees a female soloist perform a version of *Salpuri-ch'um* (a ritualistic dance often used as an exorcism) while on top of a coffin draped in white fabric.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the violence of the previous scene the atmosphere invoked through the choreography is of sorrowfulness and mourning. The dancer, who remains on the coffin throughout, conveys this mood almost entirely through the use of arm movements, all of which are slow, deliberate and consist of folding and unfolding gestures. Interspersed with this gentle choreography are shoulder shrugs that seem to represent punctuation in her eulogy to the dead. The accompanying traditional flute solo further enhances the tragic mood of this scene

The last part of the work, '*Recalling kongjumi*', is meant to denote rebirth. It is based on a Korean folk tale called *kongjumi* and uses a traditional folk song, '*Juma-juma-chong-juma*', as the accompaniment.<sup>4</sup> The song is in praise of Bong-jun Cheon who led the 1894 Donghak revolution. The revolution was an unsuccessful attempt to reverse social inequality in Korea and was fought between the farming community and the feudal state. The riot police finally quashed the farmers' insurrection and Bong-jun Cheon was burnt at the stake. The song '*Juma-juma-chong-juma*' celebrates Cheon as a folk hero and describes his belief in a fairer society.

Accompanied by this folk song, the entire company in *For My Country...* forms a long line by wrapping their arms round each other's shoulders and executing a simple step and kick sequence. Occasionally the dancers perform a step wherein, from a deep squatting position, they jump up and balance on one leg. This step is taken from



traditional mask dance choreography. The entire mood of this final section is one of rejoicing and celebration.

The costumes worn by the dancers in the first and third part of *For My Country, For My Dance* are based on traditional farmers' clothes and consist of loose off-white trousers and blouses. The reason for this is to create a link between the victims of the Massacre and the farmers that suffered during the Donghak revolution. In contrast to these pale colours, in the scene that depicts the Kwangju Massacre the dancers wear dark army uniforms. This contrast between light and dark, although based on traditional arable-workers and military clothing, is symbolic of the struggle between the 'innocent' ordinary Korean populace ('*minjung*') and the 'evil' army dictatorship. Using women to represent the peasant-culture and men as the military regime further enhances this dichotomy.

The dance critic, Chae-hyeon Kim (1989) identifies this work as Grand Dance Theatre, a hybrid art form that uses elements of traditional mask dance and western drama.<sup>5</sup> As such, he suggests, *For My Country...* cannot be categorised according to existing dance genres but, rather, challenges the ideological boundaries that separate ballet, modern and Korean dance. One of the ways in which this dance work can be read as disruptive of orthodox categories is, Kim contends, through its musical accompaniment. Three different sound sources are used in this work, one of which being the melodies taken from protest songs written by Yong-bum Park, played on both traditional eastern and modern western instruments. Alongside this are traditional Korean tunes played on the

'*piri*' (a traditional Korean flute) and the sound of automatic gunfire artificially reproduced on modern synthesisers and traditional drums.

Kim (1989) adds that the Korean rhythms used in the work retain an indigenous characteristic that might otherwise be lost due to the synthesisers. According to him, the mixture of synthesisers and drums effectively recreates the violence of the massacre. He goes on to point out, however, that the accompaniment tends to dominate the performance and 'lead' the choreography. As such, he concludes, *For My Country...* does not attain a high artistic standard. Moreover, because the work sees the transference of steps originally designed for theatre-in-the-round to a proscenium venue, the direction of the movement is not clear. To this end, the work fails to reach what he describes as a 'scientifically' acceptable level.

Kim's use of the term 'scientific' reveals his continuing reliance on an old-fashioned formalist rhetoric reminiscent of some of the earliest criticisms of twentieth-century dance that has, elsewhere, been largely discredited. For example, Janet Adshead-Lansdale (1999:vii) describes how the limitations of scientific rationality have, under the banner of postmodernism, been superseded by a more interpretative rationality. Rather than the search for a universal 'truth' of interpretation, she explains, ('a meaning to which all observers would subscribe') of concern today is a more fluidic approach to reading dance.

As Kim's review suggests, this more open interpretative strategy has yet to gain widespread acceptance in Korean dance scholarship. As has been suggested so far throughout this study, Korean dance critics seem, on the whole, reluctant to abandon the security offered by formalist models and develop newer and more sensitive approaches to reading dance. Moreover, a similar situation exists within Korean dance academia wherein much of the more progressive thinking happening elsewhere has yet to have any profound impact. It seems that, in Korea at least, advances made in the performance arena have yet to inspire a relevant and indigenous critical discourse. Deprived of this supportive infrastructure, much of what is happening in late twentieth century Korean dance practice risks being either rejected for being less than 'perfect' or simply unacknowledged. This lack of sensitivity and recognition is exemplified by the reaction to the following two works discussed in this chapter, neither of which enjoyed a review.

### 7.3. *Korea! My Love* (1989).

The initial impetus behind *Korea! My Love* was to highlight the treatment of Koreans by the Japanese during the Second World War. This includes how Korean victims of the Hiroshima bomb, unlike the Japanese, received no compensation from either the Japanese or Korean government. This level of inequality only added to an existing sense of injustice caused by the widespread drafting of Korean men into the Japanese army. At the same time, large numbers of young Korean women were sent to the war front as 'comfort girls', many of whom never returned.



Similar to *For My Country...*, *Korea! My Love* (1989) draws heavily upon traditional Korean dance elements as means of exploring twentieth century events. Created for the Dance Company *Dideem*, this work uses four main female dancers and a *corps* of four men who are accompanied by four musicians, playing both traditional Korean percussion and synthesisers, and ten singers. Like the previous work discussed in this chapter, it is also in three parts.

The first part, 'Alive or Destroyed', focuses on the outcome of the atomic bomb that the Americans dropped on Hiroshima during the Second World War. At the rear of the stage area is a large screen that shows images of some of the actual victims. In front of this, the choreography is inspired by how people disfigured either by the blast or the subsequent radiation poisoning might move. In order to make this movement as accurate as possible, part of the rehearsal process was devoted to the study of the physical effects of nuclear fall-out. As a result, the movement vocabulary is based largely on twisting, shaking and scratching gestures. In addition to this sense of physical distortion, the use of repeated twitching and spasmodic movements suggests some form of subsequent mental trauma. The accompaniment to this section is a series of songs that recount the sadness of women made widowed and children made orphaned by the bomb. This combination of movement and music makes *Korea! My Love* into an unambiguous piece of anti-war propaganda.

The second part of the work is a satire on the military training conducted by the American army while stationed in South Korea. Following the end of the Second World War all Korean men were (and still are) expected to complete twenty-six months of

National service. As a result, all Korean men are very familiar with 'close order drill' that involves the use of guns, hand-to-hand combat training and unquestioning loyalty to superiors. Up until the 1990s, even secondary school girls were taught these forms of military exercise.

In the dance work, the choreography is based on the sending-up of these military training exercises. The four male dancers dressed in army uniforms, all of whom are trained in drama rather than dance, perform various violent, yet simultaneously ridiculous, gestures with their guns while pulling comic faces. The lyrics of the accompanying song proclaim 'Yankee go home!' As such, this part of the dance work provides a necessary humorous relief from the more sombre and grotesque atmosphere of the first part.

The last part of *Korea! My Love*, 'Forward to a Liberated Future', consists two small scenes. First of these is a solo for a female dancer that expresses a mother's grief over the loss of her child. As with the previous work *For My Country...*, this solo is based on the slow and fluid movements of *salpuri ch'um* accompanied by mournful traditional music. The second sees all the dancers celebrating a future free from the threat of nuclear war. Accompanied by a lively percussive sound, the dancers perform a simple combination of walking and jumping steps, either in unison or individually. The mood invoked by this final dance is that of optimism and the hope for Korean independence. This idea behind this *finale* is identical to the last part of *For My Country, For My Dance*. Both are based on the traditional notion of *salpuri* as the exorcism of evil and subsequent celebration at its removal.

Beyond this use of *salpuri*, both *For My Country...* and *Korea! My Love* share many similarities. In both works, there is a clear differentiation between the 'innocent' and 'oppressed' populace and 'evil' and 'corrupt' authoritarian power. This strategy is enhanced both through the symbolic use of colour in the costumes but also through gender. Institutional power, being a patriarchal construct, is represented by using male performers while female dancers suggest the victimised 'others'. At the end of both works however, this notion of difference is deconstructed to give way for a celebration of social equality and harmony.

*Korea! My Love* was developed in collaboration with the female singer-composer, Hae-kyeong Ann. Although trained in the classical western style she composes many songs that address contemporary feminist and environmental issues. In addition, the feminist drama director, Hae-kyeong Lee was invited to work with the company in order to provide a necessary theatricality to the performance. The rehearsal process was built upon movement workshops wherein the dancers were given the opportunity to create the choreographic material. For example, a typical rehearsal might include a discussion between dancers, composer and director about what sort of imagery should be used in order to depict an anti-nuclear stance. As a result of this exchange of opinions between the three different parties an even balance between visual imagery, sound and movement was created. To this end, and because of the broad issues that the work addresses, *Korea! My Love* does not correspond to more conventional notions of what constitutes dance but, rather, like many works by Han, can be understood as a form of 'Total Theatre'.<sup>6</sup>



Unlike *Kkocksin*, however, *Korea! My Love* uses live and original accompaniment in which the anti-war message contained in the lyrics is unambiguous. Moreover, this marks a development of the use of music in *For My Country, For My Dance* wherein only the rhythms and melodies of existing resistance songs are used. To this end, both *For My Country, For My Dance* and *Korea! My Love* are much more polemical than Han's works. The downside to this overt agit-prop approach to dance performance, however, is the extent to which creativity is sacrificed for the sake of political acuity. Consequently, for the next work *Korea! My Love II*, significant changes to both the rehearsal process and performance ethos were attempted.

#### 7.4. *Korea! My Love II* (1990).

*Korea! My Love II*, another work created by the National Dance Company, *Dideem*, heralded a shift away from its fringe-based origins. It was premiered at the *Munyewhoekoan* Small Theatre, which is one of the main and most technically advanced dance theatres in South Korea. Unlike the previous work, no theatre director or music composer was used. Rather, the subject matter was expressed almost entirely through the choreography.

In keeping with the Korean National Dance philosophy, the work draws heavily upon traditional dance as a means of addressing contemporary Korean issues. This time, the concern is with the impact of the trade relations between Korea and the USA on the farming community. Like *For My Country, For My Dance* and *Korea! My Love*, the work is overtly partisan, taking sides with the 'victimised' Korean farmers.

The company consists of four main female dancers and a *corps* of eight males who have a background in drama. As with the two previous works discussed in this chapter, *Korea! My Love II* is in three parts.

The first part begins with smoke billowing across the stage to suggest the early morning mist across the fields. The suggestion is that of a Korean rural idyll. The first section of choreography is for the four women whose movements combine gestures taken from both traditional and modern dance interspersed with mime. For example, one of the foot-stamping actions suggests the flattening of the ground ready for planting seeds while the arm gesture is a stylisation of the movement of the plough. Throughout this first dance, the dancers concentrate their movements in a small area but vary their foot-stamping choreography by subtle changes of rhythm and direction. Key to this dance is the use of the sole of the foot wherein, according to traditional dance philosophy, a unique bond between dancer and the ground is formed through which *chi* energy is passed. The only accompaniment to this dance is the pre-recorded sound of birdsong.

The second part of the work sees the appearance of the male performers as representative of the Americans and their unfair trade demands. The male performers use a series of simple arm movements and facial gestures in order to demonstrate how Korea, like the rest of the third world, is no match for the power of the Americans. To re-enforce this notion of capitalist supremacy, the soundtrack includes advertisement jingles for 'coca-cola' and 'MacDonald's.'

The last part of *Korea! My Love II* is in two smaller sections. The first is a solo for a female dancer which, as with the solo dances in the previous two works discussed in this chapter, is based on traditional *salpuri-ch'um*. Here, the dance is meant to depict the suffering experienced by Korean farmers as a result of American trade rules. While the woman dances, rice drops from the ceiling: rice being not only a staple of the Korean diet but also a symbol of the farming industry. Wearing a plain white dress, she is lit by a single overhead red light. As a consequence, the falling rice takes on the appearance of drops of blood.

The last section of the work is meant as a depiction of the Korean authoritarian government as America's 'poodle' or 'lap-dog'. The message is that, in order to build a better and fairer society, Korea needs to break free from its subservience to America. The choreography is based on various jumping and hopping steps taken from *nongak*: an energetic and celebratory traditional farmer's dance. To enhance this euphoric atmosphere, the lighting closely resembles that which is used in night-clubs or discotheques.

Unlike *For My Country...* and *Korea! My Love*, this work sees a shift away from the collaborative rehearsal methodology and the search for a balance between drama, music and dance. Instead, the emphasis is placed on the development of the aesthetic and symbolic aspects of the choreography. Certain other traits, however, are retained. First is the deliberate use of gender. In all three works, men are given a supportive role as 'evil' institutional forms of power. Women, who enjoy most of the choreography, portray the suffering members of the Korean population, whether it those involved in



the *Kwangju Massacre* in *For My Country...*, the Second World War in *Korea! My Love* or those who suffered as a result of American trade rules in *Korea! My Love II*.

There are several reasons for using this simple gender division in the works. First, is a response to a resiliently patriarchal Korean society that silences and marginalises women. All three dance works deal with important events in recent Korean history, the authorised versions of which have focused on the suffering of the pro-democracy campaigners, Korean soldiers or farmers. In each case, the impact upon the womenfolk has been largely overlooked and it is this historical omission that these works attempt to redress. Another reason for giving the women in the company the more expressive roles is to continue the legacy of traditional Korean dance wherein the articulation of emotional states such as love, sadness and grief is most associated with female dancers. The last reason is that, as in western culture, dance training and performance is still widely understood as a feminising pursuit. As a result, very few men take up a career in dance so, on a practical level, it is much easier to create works that require female dancers.

In all three works, although it is the women who are depicted as the ones who suffer, in the end, this sense of victimisation is overcome. All three works end on an optimistic note that also sees both the male and female dancers enjoying an equal share of the choreography and performance space. This representation of women as being able to survive and flourish is, however, in marked contrast to the way they are depicted in *Kkocksin*.

Like *Kkocksin*, all three dance works discussed in this chapter incorporate a form of *salpuri*. In Hans' work, however, this traditional method of eradicating evil seems unsuccessful and the performance ends in tragedy for the young brides and frustration for the men. While the end of *For My Country...*, *Korea! My Love* and *Korea! My Love II* imagines a harmonic future based on gender parity, the final image of *Kkocksin* sees the mute and expressionless women disappear altogether.

Hans' comparatively *misérabiliste* attitude towards gender can be traced back to key aspects of his rehearsal methodology. Han's approach to creating choreography is based almost exclusively on an old-fashioned teacher and pupil relationship in which he demonstrates the movement to be precisely copied by the dancers. In such a strategy no space is given to the individual expressive capabilities of the dancers. In contrast, the rehearsal methodology used for the three works in this chapter is based on a workshop approach to developing movement. In this model, dancers can not only tailor moves to suit their physique but can add their own interpretative qualities to the performance. Han's more traditional rehearsal process also sees him choosing the music first to which the choreography is then attached. In *For My Country...*, *Korea! My Love* and *Korea! My Love II*, a collaborative process was pursued wherein the composer worked alongside the choreographer, director and dancers.

The only decision-making role in *Kkocksin* belongs to the choreographer: the work is almost exclusively a single man's perspective. The result of this autocratic approach to performance (wherein the only individual expressive solo belongs to the choreographer)

is a very narrow representative canvas wherein women remain stereotypical and passive ciphers.

Han's authoritarian position is not unusual in Korean dance practice. An old-fashioned master/servant convention has resulted in a situation wherein silent dancers must obey their teachers and choreographers. Any demonstration of resistance to this strict code of conduct can result in the dancer/student being unable to find work. Furthermore, this highly restrictive legacy has had a profound impact on the development of Korean dance practice in that it tends to suffocate the creative impulse. Ironically, perhaps, this power relationship not restricted to male teachers and female dancers (although it is clear that men have the most to gain from their favoured status). Many women choreographers and teachers also follow this standard practice, possibly because they fear that to challenge the *status quo* would constitute professional suicide.

Company policy for both *Buleem* and *Dideem* challenges this sort of institutionalism by allowing all its members (whether they are dancers, musicians or drama directors) a voice in the rehearsal process. This microcosm of a society in which power and responsibility is shared is the basis upon which all three works can end on a positive vision of the future, not only for Korean dance, but for culture more widely.

### 7.5. Conclusion.

The three works discussed in this chapter were devised as political statements upon key events in post-colonial Korea. Also, and as part of the Korean National Dance



movement, they were also a means of trying to preserve the traditional dance culture by drawing upon many of its characteristics as choreographic inspiration. The most noticeable downside to this pursuit of an agit-prop approach to performance and a desire to support indigenous dance legacy is the sacrifice of creativity. Although some choreographers have been able to marry an imaginative approach to choreography with controversial subject matter, this has not been the case in respect to these three works. The possibility is that, in *For My Country...*, *Korea! My Love* and *Korea! My Love II*, in the relationship between politics and aesthetics, too much emphasis was given to message and not enough to the creative impulse. Moreover, this use of dance as a political platform, although considered culturally important at the time, has, in retrospect, looked increasingly naïve and oversimplistic.

Fundamental to this notion of dance as political vehicle is an 'old-style' and somewhat essentialist feminist attitude towards gender wherein men are the universal 'evil' oppressors and women are the 'innocent' oppressed. Moreover, in all three works, the preoccupation with exploring and celebrating traditional Korean dance elements, as propounded by the Korean National Dance Movement, has led to a rejectionist attitude towards non-indigenous dance codes. As was argued at this beginning of this study, however, key to the development of an intercultural dance culture in Korea with an indigenous integrity is the breaking down of barriers between different cultural practices rather than building them up. As has already been suggested in respect to Han's *Kkocksin*, it is not enough to express a sense of frustration over the existing situation: what is more important is to effect change.

The three works discussed in the next chapter are *Flaming* (1986), *Dancing DNA* (1994) and *Forgotten Past* (1994). All three works, unlike those discussed in this chapter, are based on western dance codes: the first being an example of modern dance while the other two are ballets. As such, none of these works share the National Dance preoccupation with preserving tradition. To this end, the concern in Chapter Eight will be to what extent these works can be read as a more balanced approach to the need for an intercultural Korean dance practice. Moreover, as all three works were performed in Korea by Korean dancers, attention will be paid to what impact this has on the two western dance vocabularies used.

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<sup>1</sup> See note 10 in Chapter Three for more detail.

<sup>2</sup> See 2.3.3. for more detail.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of *Salpuri-ch'um*, see 2.2.2.

<sup>4</sup> Juma-juma-chong-juma' is a song in praise of Bong-jun Jern, who led the 1894 Donghak revolution.

<sup>5</sup> See 3.3.

<sup>6</sup> See, in particular, 4.2. and the discussion of Han's canon.



## **Chapter Eight.**

**Twentieth century Korean history and western dance:  
An analysis of the impact of non-indigenous dance codes on  
Korean dance culture.**

## 8.1. Introduction.

Even after nearly a decade of the Korean Dance Movement and their promotion of indigenous practice the use of western dance techniques as a means of expressing national issues has remained a common strategy. One of the most widely recognised choreographers who employs western dance codes into their work is Jung-hee Lee whose *Salpuri 9* was analysed in Chapter Five. As was revealed, the ‘contraction and release’ action and the angular body-shapes unique to Graham technique are used as a means of depicting both the physical and psychological impact of the Korean War. The adopting and adapting of non-indigenous movement codes, however, is not limited to modern dance. Other Korean choreographers have used a more classical vocabulary (predominantly ballet) as a means of expression.

The reason why Korean choreographers choose to look beyond indigenous dance forms is difficult to precisely quantify. One possible reason is that some may be dissatisfied with what they regard as some of the expressive limitations inherent to traditional Korean dance. For others, it may be because much of their own training has been in western dance techniques and they might feel wary of moving outside what is familiar. Another explanation could be to do with the relationship between form and content in that all dance techniques are, to some extent, culturally ‘loaded’. For example, many critics have expressed concern with what they believe to be ballet’s ‘institutionalist’ legacy replete with its own western ‘ideal’ notions of gender representation, hierarchy and body-shape. It is also a technique closely associated with the fairytale narrative that, itself, retains an old-fashioned Plato-Christian ethos wherein good conquers evil and

heterosexual marriage is the only legitimate and stable basis for love. Such a legacy is not easy to shake off and, as such, renders ballet as a less than suitable genre through which to explore certain themes. For example, it is almost impossible to imagine the ballet code as a vehicle through which to articulate the harshness of Korean War such as in Lee's *Salpuri 9*. A similar problematic legacy also surrounds much traditional Korean dance practice in that, as has already been argued in this study, it has its origins in ritual. For choreographers wishing to explore more contemporary concerns, this association with ancient religious practice may be regarded as less than beneficial to a more 'forward-looking' intercultural Korean dance culture.

The complexities and high level of unresolvable speculation that would be involved in any detailed investigation into why some choreographers chose to look beyond their own shores for expressive vocabularies renders it of little value to the purposes of this study. More useful, perhaps, is an analysis of the impact of such a policy, not only on the works themselves, but also how this affects the development of a Korean dance culture that many critics still consider as lagging behind its western equivalent. For example, the discussion of *Salpuri 9* revealed how a tension exists between the non-indigenous and modern dance code (and its subliminal reference to a 'western invasion' during the colonial period) and the theme of the Korean War. Furthermore, just as this use of a western dance code can, through its 'alien'-ness, impose a critical distance between the work and the spectator so the highly emotive subject matter can, in turn, affect the dance code itself.



To this end, this strategy of investigating the impact of using non-indigenous dance codes in order to explore Korean issues will be pursued in this chapter. Three works; *Flaming* (1986) *Dancing DNA* (1994) and *Forgotten Past* (1994) will be analysed. As with the previous analytical chapters, a comparative procedure will be used wherein the extent to which the way meaning is articulated and how the dance code itself is affected will be contrasted with findings drawn from the analysis of Lee's *Salpuri 9*. Finally, and in respect to the intercultural directive of this study, the readings of all three works will also include an examination of differences between the way both national and gender identities are represented.

## 8.2. *Flaming* (1986).

Perhaps one of the most dramatic and tragic events in recent Korean history was the series of political suicides during the middle of the 1980s wherein a number of labourers and students deliberately set fire to themselves. Their protest was with an authoritarian government that forbade them from forming their own unions and denied them democratic rights. This dark period in Korea's past formed the impetus behind *Flaming* (1986), a dance work that focuses on the harshness of the female labourers life.

The work was created for the Dance Company *Bulim*, the members of which are all trained in ballet, modern and Korean dance. The last two years that these dancers spent at Ewha University was occupied with the organisation of a dance company independent of the existing feudalistic, professor led, system. Their concern was also with what they saw as the problematic status of Korean dance during the middle of the

1980s wherein too many practitioners were more concerned with slavishly copying western dance techniques rather than adapting them in order to address National concerns.

Central to *Bulim*'s rejection of a professor-led tradition is a collaborative process wherein the dancers, choreographer and musicians create through 'idea' workshops. For *Flaming*, for example, a simple movement gesture might inspire the composer, Yongbum Park, whose subsequent musical response might lead to further choreographic developments. Similarly, a short musical phrase might provide choreographic impetus. The result of this strategy is an almost symbiotic balance between music and movement, which is reflected in the clearly visible presence of the musicians as they provide accompaniment on synthesisers and traditional Korean drums. The closeness of the relationship between musicians and dancers is also shared with the audience who, for the first performance, were seated along three sides of the small performance space. This proximity, not only between spectator and dancer but also between one side of the audience and the other contributes to the intimate atmosphere of the work which, as will be explained in the analysis, is vital to the subject matter.

The structure of this work, unlike those discussed in Chapter Seven, consists of a series of three 'question and response' scenes. The 'question' parts deal with the difficulty of manual labour in which modern dance movement material is used to mimic the action of weavers as they produce cloth on giant looms. The repeated simple gestures create a sense of almost 'soulless' monotony, as though the weaver is less human and more like a machine. The other action in the 'question' section is based on a war-simulation

computer game wherein the dancers run across the stage, listen for the sound of gun-fire and then fall to the floor as though shot. As with the weaver-movement, the purpose is to suggest that women are nothing more than expendable and insignificant parts of a larger machine. The sense of alienation and mechanisation is further emphasised by the sombre grey uniforms and the use of a repeated drum rhythm and synthesised computer-game tunes.

The 'answer' sections are used to illustrate the psychological impact of this monotonous lifestyle on the women labourers. To suggest this 'inner' depth' the women all remove their grey uniform jackets to reveal various coloured t-shirts. The movement material for these answer sections also contrasts with the 'question' sections as it includes more expansive gestures and steps derived from the ballet vocabulary.

For example, one of the main movements in this section is based on the action of a tightrope walker. Two dancers traverse the stage as though trying to balance on a high wire. The precariousness of this activity is emphasised by the deliberately extended lifting of the knee as they move. The symbolic import of this sequence is meant to suggest the unstable political situation in 1980s Korea: the idea being, the higher the leg is lifted, the more difficult the position becomes to control. To that end, it was necessary to have dancers trained in ballet for whom such extended leg positions are pre-requisite. At the same time as two dancers perform this tightrope act, two others walk across the stage as though blind. As with the other two, the movement is deliberately exaggerated in order to convey the notion of an unstable Korean society. The tension provoked by



the choreography is further emphasised by the chaotic drumming pattern of the accompaniment.

In the last 'question' section of the work the atmosphere of oppression and machine-like activity is finally dissipated. In its place, and through the use of powerful and more expansive choreography, the dancers attempt to articulate a more 'positive' model of female labour. To this end, more steps are taken from ballet technique such as *développés*, *pas-de-bourrées*, *chassées* and *soussous*.<sup>1</sup> These are put together in various combinations in order to replace monotony with creative diversity.

Alongside these 'classical' steps the dancers also clench their fists as a way of depicting their struggle for independence. Beyond this historical reference, such overt displays of physical strength can also be read as a challenge to more mainstream conceptions of Korean female dancers as passive, demure and delicate. In contrast to this more traditional representation of 'ideal' female beauty, *Flaming* brings on stage a more dynamic and active sense of female identity.

In the final 'answer' section, the dancers very slowly undo the buttons on their uniforms and let down their hair. This action is a reference to shaman dance and *salpuri-ch'um*, wherein the undoing of knots symbolises the process of solving problems.<sup>2</sup> This association is further emphasised by the contrasting fast pace of the music wherein, as with traditional forms, it creates a *yin-yang* balance. Thematically, this gesture also reads as a political act of defiance wherein the women, frustrated with their subservience, 'throw off their shackles' and make a bid for freedom and independence.

The last gesture of the dance work sees all the dancers come to the centre of the stage and, holding their arms straight upwards, depict the act of self-conflagration. Red lighting provides the suggestion not only of the flames but also refers to the left-wing labour movement.

Beyond its direct political message concerning the plight of Korean women labourers, *Flaming* can also be read as a challenge to the barriers that exist between western and indigenous dance codes. The reviewer Chae-hyeon Kim (1980) describes this work as the first stage of a young dancers rebellion against more mainstream dance practice in Korea. First, he contends, *Flaming* signals a break from an existing Korean dance practice that, for too long, has been bound by genre. Second, he adds, the depiction of women in the work challenges an old-fashioned model of 'ideal' beauty. Third, the success of the work can be read as a clear demonstration that the feudalistic master/servant construction of dance companies is not the only practical model.

The collaborative process first used in *Flaming* was subsequently deployed, to some extent, for all the dance works choreographed during the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s, however, the political situation in Korea changed dramatically and, consequently this had an impact on working practice. Another reason for reverting to a more orthodox choreographer/dancer company structure was due to the slowness of workshop rehearsals. Furthermore, a previous political directive no longer seemed to be imperative; rather, the growing concern during the 1990s was with exploring more creative and experimental impulses. The result of this shift in structure and emphasis was two works: *Dancing DNA* (1994) and *Forgotten Past* (1994).

### 8.3. *Dancing DNA* (1994).

*Dancing DNA* is a work that was originally devised to address the growing pollution problem in South Korea due to rapid industrial and population expansion. The work tells of the death of an unborn baby due to atmospheric poisoning. Two fish in a tank that is suspended above the dance space symbolically represent the baby in the womb.

For this work, a new Dance Company was formed; the Cho-Kisook Dance Company. The work was premiered at *Saejong Munwhawhoekan* Small Theatre, a well-known three hundred seat venue in Seoul with a company of ten female and two male ballet-trained dancers. Unlike *Flaming*, the entire music accompaniment was pre-recorded. A well-established artist, Gun-beong Yuk, was hired to assist in the stage design.

*Dancing DNA* is in three parts, the first of which recreates the lively movement of spermatozoon. The dancers, all wearing flesh-coloured body-stockings, are first seen lying diagonally across the stage while face-up and supported on their hands as if to suggest spermatozoa about to go to the egg. As with *Flaming*, much of the choreography is balletic in origin. For example, the dancers, while holding a turnout of the legs, walk toe-heel through a stretched rather than flexed or flat foot that is more associated with traditional Korean dance. Other archetypal ballet movements include *développés* and *arabesques* that are used to denote the tail of the sperm while a liquid quality is suggested through the use of *balancés* and *pirouettes*.<sup>4</sup>



To further emphasise the movement quality and shape of spermatozoa, most of the choreography is for the legs and torso: the arms are most often restricted to either *arabesque* lines or held in an overhead curved shape.

One female and one male dancer perform in the second part of *Dancing DNA*, which depicts the imaginary pain of the unborn baby as it struggles to stay alive. While the female represents the baby the male symbolises pollution. Both dancers wear black costumes that are full of small tears. While lit by an overhead spotlight, the women executes a series of gentle curling and uncurling gestures that suggest the movement of the baby in the womb. In contrast, and to represent the spread of pollutants, the male dancer performs a sequence of hops and jumps while traversing the stage.

The idea of this section is that the energy (or *chi*) required for the male to perform is being drawn from the female dancer. As a consequence, her movements continue to slow down until she becomes motionless. At the same time, black ink is slowly dripped into the fish-tank that eventually kills the fish. The black of the costumes and the colour of the water both emphasise pollution as a bringer of death.

The last part of *Dancing DNA* is in two small sections. In the first, three females dressed in green costumes dance together. To convey an atmosphere of happiness and jollity they swing their upper bodies rapidly from side to side. While executing this comic gesture they traverse the stage in diagonal lines and circles.

The second section continues this celebratory mood with a dance for the entire company. To emphasise a sense of joy, the overall direction of the choreography is upwards. For example, as though worshipping the sun, the dancers take their arms from an overhead curved shape and open them to the sides while lifting their gaze. They also execute *grand-jetés* and *couru*, steps that both have an airborne and floating quality.<sup>5</sup>

The final sequence sees ten of the dancers form a large circle in the middle of the stage as though representing a womb. In this circle a male and a female dancer perform a short *pas-de-deux*. Part of this duet sees the male lift the female on to his shoulder and then overhead. Their dancing is meant to convey the glory of life and the fecundity of nature. To this end all the dancers wear green costumes: the women in long skirts and blouses and the men in trousers and t-shirts. The underlying dynamic of this work is the struggle between a series of opposing forces: good and evil; nature and industry; and life and death. This dichotomy is reflected in the make-up of the company wherein the women represent goodness/nature/life and the men are evil/industry/death.

Beyond this, this dance work can be read as contributing to the development of ballet in Korean dance culture. Rather than using ballet according to an old-fashioned western fantasy-narrative tradition and its quasi-romantic quest for 'ideal beauty', the aim in this work was to wrest it away from such a nostalgic legacy and, instead, use it to address relevant social concerns. This strategy is exemplified by the rejection of *pointe* shoes for the female dancers.

Although most of the movement material for *Dancing DNA* is balletic in origin, all of the dancers are barefoot. Symbolically, the reason for this is to both denote the tail of the spermatozoon and emphasise the link between the choreography and nature. The use of *pointe* shoes, although a traditional part of women's ballet, would, it is believed, lend an artificiality to the choreography that is inappropriate for the subject matter. There is, however, another agenda being addressed in the work. By rejecting this costume convention also signals a break from a highly restrictive ethos that has continued to surround, and some argue, suffocate ballet in Korean culture.

Rather than a museum piece with no cultural significance, the purpose in *Dancing DNA* was to reveal the ballet vocabulary as applicable to a culturally relevant (and globally significant) subject and, as such, contribute to the intercultural development of Korean dance culture. To achieve that, however, it was important to try to remove as much of ballet's 'fantasy narrative' and gender idealist 'baggage' as possible. The most obvious way to do that was to challenge the stereotypical image of the *pointe*-shod and *tutu*-wearing ballerina. In addition to this, the 'classical' steps were combined with movement elements drawn from a wide range of non-ballet sources including traditional Korean as well as modern western dance.

The downside to this emphasis on challenging ballet conventions, however, was a choreographic imbalance wherein not enough attention was given to what impact this would have on other incorporated vocabularies. Due to ballet's legacy, distinctive movement quality and substantial vocabulary, characteristics drawn from other sources were almost completely dissociated from their own roots. For example, although an



attempt was made to incorporate indigenous elements into the work such as the tying and untying motif from *salpuri ch'um*, divorced from their original Korean context, such references disappeared under the historical 'weight' of the ballet code. In the case of *Dancing DNA*, the pursuit of experimentation resulted in the sacrifice of a balanced relationship between east and west. In retrospect, this was due to a certain *naïveté* surrounding the historical and aesthetic 'shadow' that ballet casts over all other dance genres, whether eastern or western.

Rehearsals for the following work *Forgotten Past* (also choreographed in 1994) began with the intention of remedying this imbalance. To this end, more attention was given to incorporating some of the characteristics of traditional Korean dance practice into the performance alongside a recognition of how these could be affected due to the proximity of other non-indigenous genres.

#### 8.4. *Forgotten Past* (1994).

*Forgotten Past*, along with eight other dance works, was premiered at the *Munyewhoekwan* Grand Theatre as part of the first National Dance Festival.<sup>6</sup> Six performers trained in ballet, modern and Korean dance and two trained in drama made up the original cast. As with *Flaming* and *Dancing DNA*, *Forgotten Past* draws on elements of both western and indigenous dance in order to address an issue of national importance. In this case, the impetus behind the work was as a reminder of the period of authoritarian rule in Korea.

Set in the near future, the work concerns a child's visit, accompanied by her grandfather, to the museum of a dictator. Although unnamed in the dance work, this dictator is based on three authoritarian rulers: Park Chung-hee (1961-1979), Chun Doo-hwan (1981-1986) and Roh Tae-woo (1987-1992). The structure of the work consists of a prologue, four main parts and an epilogue.

Set in front of the curtain, the prologue sees the child and her grandfather on their way to the museum. The young girl conveys her excitement about the visit through the use of a series of symbolic arm gestures such as drawing a large heart shape in the air and gently stretching her arms to her side and moving them like a bird's wings. The curtain then opens onto the first of four parts, all of which are set in the museum.

At the beginning of the first part, several performers, frozen in various poses, are dotted around the stage. Each of them represents a statue; one of which wears an army uniform, sunglasses and carries a baton. This is the costume that Park Chung-hee wore throughout most of his rule. Using a sequence of mime gestures, the young girl asks her grandfather who this figure is. At this point the statue becomes animated and, in a sequence of *grand jetés* and *grand jetés en tournant*, traverses the stage space while twirling his baton.<sup>7</sup> This use of large leaps is meant to suggest power and control.

In the second half of this first part, four female dancers appear onstage. They are joined by the young girl for an ensemble sequence that includes such steps as *pas de bourrées* and *soussous* and poses such as *arabesques* and *attitudes*.<sup>8</sup> Interspersed with this ballet vocabulary are mimed movements that are meant to represent machinery and a heel-toe

walking step common to Korean traditional dance. Another more specific reference to Korean tradition is an arm gesture that involves slowly describing a circle above the head before suddenly stretching the arm out to the side. This action, often used in mask dance, is meant to symbolise exorcising evil. Another reference to Korean dance is the pre-recorded music that uses a drum rhythm called *Kukgeri*.

In contrast to the liveliness and aerial quality of the choreography in part one of this work, the second part begins with six female and one male dancer lying face down on the floor with their hands seemingly tied behind their backs. While in this position they twitch and writhe as though they are being beaten. The inspiration behind this sequence is a series of photographs that graphically portray the torture of Koreans, by direct order from Chun Doo-hwan during the *Kwangju* massacre.<sup>9</sup> For example, one image is of a woman who died as a result of having her breasts cut off, while another shows a pregnant woman who was killed by having her abdomen sliced open. Although it was not possible to recreate this horrific imagery on the stage, to make a link between the performance and the massacre, the melody of a very popular tune that celebrates the *Kwangju* victims was played. While the dancers continue with their spasmodic movements, another male dancer uses a combination of mimed arm gestures and ballet steps to symbolise a sequence of hitting, trampling, stabbing and shooting.

Part three of *Forgotten Past* begins with six female dancers performing a comic dance routine. While sat on the floor they pull their tops over their knees and then attempt to walk while holding their arms above their heads in a balletic fifth position. When a dancer attempts to move faster they fall over. The original idea for this sequence is a



scene taken from a popular television comedy in South Korea. This comedy satires the wealthy Korean ruling classes who achieve social status through flattery, bribery and corruption. As they no longer need to do any physical work they become fat. This obesity is suggested, in *Forgotten Past*, through the use of the shirts over the knees that restrict movement.

In contrast to the comic mood of this first section of part three, the second section uses a male duet to invoke a more serious atmosphere. One of the two dancers is dressed in white and is trained in Tae Kwon Do, a Korean martial art. The other, who is all in black, is a ballet dancer. At the beginning of their duet they slowly walk around in a circle and stare at each other as though sizing up an opponent before a fight. The dancer in white then performs a series of defence and attack gestures such as kicking his leg and making fists with his hands. The other, in response, executes a sequence of large ballet jumps including *grand jetés*, *grand jetés en tournant* and *sissonnes*.

The purpose behind this duet was to demonstrate the antagonistic relationship between the populace (the man in white) and the authoritarian government (the man in black). Although the two men continue to threaten each other throughout this dance, no actual physical contact is made. The suggestion is, although each side of the political fence is both angry and wary, neither wants to take responsibility for any possible escalation of social unrest. Instead, and to signal the end of the duet, the rest of the dancers enter the performance space to signal the start of the fourth, and final, section of the dance work.

These seven performers are meant to represent the spirits of ordinary Koreans who were killed by the authoritarian dictators. Their choreography once again combines ballet steps such as *assemblés*, *sissonnes* and *pas de chat*, mimed actions that symbolise manual labour and punching and kicking movements derived from Korean martial arts.<sup>10</sup> All of these are interlinked by the use of the heel-toe walking step taken from Korean traditional dance. As with *Flaming* and *Dancing DNA*, the atmosphere created through this choreography and the accompanying music is one of celebration. The epilogue to *Forgotten Past* sees the young girl and the grandfather leave the museum, the remainder of the performers returning to their original static positions.

The original, and main, impetus behind this work was to address one of the darkest periods in recent Korean history. Rather than articulating a shared sense of guilt and blame that, it was argued, was the message behind Lee's *Salpuri 9*, however, the motivation for this work was predominantly satire. Each of the three authoritarian leaders depicted in *Forgotten Past* was deliberately made to look as ridiculous as possible through a *Grand Guignol* sense of theatricality. Consequently, while *Salpuri 9*'s view of history is unremittingly bleak, *Forgotten Past*'s is made up of periods of both light and dark. This use of contrast between the tragic and the comic creates a tension in the work wherein the proximity between the two has the effect of heightening the dramatic impact.

This friction between light and dark is mirrored by a similar tension between the two main choreographic references used in the work; ballet and traditional Korean dance. One of the problems that was discussed in reference to the previous work in this



chapter, *Dancing DNA*, was the subjugating impact of the ballet code on all other elements of the performance. To this end, while steps taken from the 'classical' movement repertoire were also used in this work, more attention was given to how certain qualities unique to ballet could be used to enhance indigenous references. For example, in traditional Korean dance, the leg is very rarely lifted higher than thirty degrees from the ground and jumps are kept relatively small. Furthermore, there is a specific physiological hierarchy to Korean dance wherein all leg movements are regarded as secondary in importance to those for the upper body, arms and head.

In contrast, in the ballet code, great emphasis is given to exploring the widest possible range of movement and height of the leap. This is assisted through the use of turnout in the legs. Furthermore, it is also possible to read a physiological hierarchy that is inverse to traditional Korean dance wherein the arms are often used to enhance the line created by the leg or are held in position while the legs execute complex steps. In turn, this emphasis on large scale movement in ballet, in comparison to the more small-scale associated with traditional Korean dance, is the result of cultural and class-based differences. Classical ballet, as a 'high art' form, was originally designed to be performed in large proscenium venues while traditional Korean dance, as a 'low art' activity was first performed in relatively small, 'in-the-round' environments such as village squares.

In *Forgotten Past*, both of these two vocabularies (and their specific cultural legacies) are combined. Of concern was how each of these two seemingly diametrically 'opposite' codes, through their proximity, could enhance the other. To that end, ballet's



‘grand theatricality’ is tempered by intimate gestures unique to Korean dance while the relatively small-scale of traditional indigenous dance was enhanced to fit within a theatre venue.

This notion of both ‘western’ ballet and ‘eastern’ traditional dance working together for the benefit of the work is, elsewhere, described by the reviewer Chae-hyeon Kim (1994). He suggests that the success of the work can be attributed to the intelligent adoption of ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ elements. As such, he continues, *Forgotten Past* can be read as a work that contributes to the development of a post-colonial Korean dance culture that, while retaining an indigenous character, looks beyond National boundaries.

#### 8.5. Conclusion.

The rehearsal strategy employed for *Dancing DNA* and *Forgotten Past* was, in contrast to the one used in *Flaming*, to choreograph the movements and teach them to the dancers. Although this could be read as a regressive step towards an old fashioned teacher/pupil hierarchy there were two reasons for its adoption. First, efficiency, in that, although the workshop method was useful when time was not a limiting factor, when the rehearsal period is only a few weeks, such indulgent practices are wasteful. Second, part of the process for *Dancing DNA* and *Forgotten Past* involved paying attention to the different qualities that each dancer could bring to the performance. Instead of ‘forcing’ all the dancers to follow a single movement code, each one was allowed to incorporate their own training backgrounds. For example, in *Forgotten Past*, one male dancer’s knowledge of Tae Kwon Do was put to good effect.

To that end, while providing 'space' for the dancers in which they could utilise their own talents, everything was set within a controlled 'professional' artistic environment. In that way, aesthetic sensibilities were able to develop alongside more politically motivated concerns. Moreover, the three other practitioners discussed in Part Two also frequently use this rehearsal process: namely Han, Lee and Nam.

*Forgotten Past* sees the fusion of concerns about social issues and the aesthetics of dance performance. On a wider perspective, a need to address major concerns such as National defence, feminism and the environment has, throughout the 1980s and 90s, undergone a process of 'sophistication'. This is not only because of changes in the political structure of Korea but also due to an ongoing need to expand and develop choreographic practice. In other words, rather than view dance as nothing more than a vehicle for articulating political belief, a more dialogical concept has arisen. Not only does the subject matter dictate the movement but, more often, the movement itself can suggest meaning.

To that end, the next chapter will present an analysis of two dance works that were choreographed and premiered in Britain: *Movement Experience* (1999) and *O* (2000). Of concern in this next chapter will be to what extent a shift in inspiration, technique and geography impacted upon the ongoing search for a model of dance practice that, while retaining a distinctly Korean character, can also be read as intercultural.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Horst Koegler (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Ballet*, 1987: 123, 91), *développés* 'designates the unfolding of the working leg into an open position in the air, where it is held with perfect control', *chassé* is 'a sliding step, in which one foot displaces the other as if by chasing it'. *Pas-de-bourrée* is a sequence of three steps that follow a 'down-up-up' rhythm while *Soussous* refers to a step wherein both feet are pulled together on a rise in a small springing action (often executed *on pointe*).

<sup>2</sup> See 2.3.4.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Seven analysis of *For My Country, For My Dance* (1987), *Korea! My Love* (1989) and *Korea! My Love II* (1990).

<sup>4</sup> According to Koegler (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Ballet*, 1987: 30), *balancé* is 'designates in b. a rocking step from one foot to the other, mostly executed in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time.

<sup>5</sup> According to Koegler (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Ballet*, 1987: 106), *couru* is 'the pas couru is a running step as a preparation for a jump'.

<sup>6</sup> For more detail on the National Dance Festival see 3.6.

<sup>7</sup> *Grand jeté* is a big jump step as if cross the river. *Grand jeté en tournant* is *grand jeté* with turning and change legs at the air.

<sup>8</sup> The dancer who portrays the young girl and the grandfather remain as members of the *corps* until the epilogue, at which point they return to their original roles.

<sup>9</sup> For more detail on the Kwangju massacre, see Chapter Three note ten.

<sup>10</sup> According to Koegler (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Ballet*, 1987: 23), *assemblés* 'designate the leap from one to both feet, usually landing in the fifth position. The *pas de chat* 'derives its name from likeness to the movement of a leaping cat.' A *Sissonne* is a leap from both feet to one foot and, because of the 'opening' action of the legs in mid-air, takes its name from the French for scissors.



## **Chapter Nine.**

### **Interculturalism and dance practice: An analysis of *Movement Experience* and *O*.**

### 9.1. Introduction.

Chapter Seven and Eight presented an analysis of six dance works that were all devised and performed in South Korea between 1985 and 1994. Using a comparative methodology, wherein findings drawn from these analyses were compared with those taken from the analysis of works in Chapters Four and Five (respectively Han's *Kkocksin* and Lees' *Salpuri 9*), of concern was the extent to which different combinations of dance codes and themes impacted upon the intercultural dimension of the works. Although the use of various choreographic styles of both eastern and western origin was read as having a profound effect, one unifying factor was clearly discerned.

As each work was both inspired by, and concerned with commenting upon, both the prevailing political situation and issues of National importance in Korea during that time, this had the result of imposing a limitation upon the symbolic import of the movement. In other words, it was argued, the predominant didactic and agit-propaganda contextual dimension of these works took precedence over more co-textual matters such as choreographic invention and experimentation. This concern with National issues above those of a more aesthetic nature, it was suggested, had the effect of weakening the intercultural potential of the works because it sacrificed an 'open' inclusive policy for a more 'inward-looking' exclusivity.

Two key factors have altered this contextual/co-textual relationship. First, a major change in the political landscape of Korea from brutal authoritarianism to democracy at the end of the twentieth century and, second, my move to Britain in 1995. As a result, a

need to engage with the minutiae of Korean politics has given way to a desire to further explore more aesthetic concerns. This chapter presents an analysis of two works, *Movement Experience* (1999) and *O* (2000) that resulted from this change of direction. Furthermore, and in accordance with a strategy pursued in the last two chapters, a comparative procedure will be followed wherein evidence drawn from the analysis of Nam's *Pallae* will contribute to the reading of these two works.

The purpose for analysing these two dance works within a comparative framework is to examine to what extent a shift in location and creative impetus has impacted upon the intercultural dimension of the choreography. To that end, the introduction to this chapter will present a brief history of the various contemporary western choreographic techniques and working methods that I have investigated while in Britain. In what ways these experiences can then be read as both making a contribution to, and shifting the direction of, both working practice and choice of subject matter will then form part of the analytical strategy used for *Movement Experience* and *O*. Furthermore, and because this study is concerned with exploring the dialogical nature of the east/west and traditional/modern axes, whether, and in what ways, these western codes were themselves affected by their incorporation into a choreographic style heavily influenced by traditional Korean dance practice will also be examined.

One of the first contemporary choreography techniques I studied in Britain was led by Rosemary Butcher. Central to her working practice is making 'abstract' movement phrases out of seemingly simple gestures and actions. These she then 'threads' together to form the basic choreographic structure. This notion of starting from the 'outside', at



first, seemed alien to someone who had previously used dance as an emotional response to political concerns: in other words, working from the 'inside out'. Butcher's approach provided a means of escape from this tendency to view both the dancer and the dance as little more than a vehicle for expressing the choreographer's political belief. In its place was the freedom to explore movement for its own sake. Furthermore, her working practice was to invite the dancer to contribute to the creative process and, in so doing, collapse the rigid teacher/student boundary. Not only that but, rather than using dance performance as a means of conveying a specific and pre-determined point of view, the concern is with allowing the spectator the opportunity to exercise a greater level of free-will in the interpretation process. A similar ethos was also discovered as inherent to many other dance techniques I studied in Britain.

One such was 'contact improvisation'. As the name suggests, key to this dance code is an emphasis upon experimentation and improvised movement. In contrast to the 'alien-ness' of the Butcher approach, however, a striking similarity between the 'contact improvisation' rehearsal practice and traditional shaman dance was discovered. Rather than being based on the linking together of specific and pre-planned steps, both contact improvisation and shaman dance invite the dancer to make their own decisions as to the direction, shape and size of the movement.

Where contact improvisation and shaman differ, however, is in respect to the notion of contact. The reliance upon the dancers supporting and actively manipulating each other's bodies in contact improvisation is not shared by shaman dance. Rather, in shaman dance, the concern is with the exchange of *chi*. There is virtually no physical

contact except when the dancer touches the spectator in a healing capacity. Another notable difference between contact improvisation and shaman dance is the range and quality of the movement. Contact improvisation is based on movements that stem from instability and imbalance and the constant shift between resisting and succumbing to gravity: it is a dance of 'taking risks'. This lends the movement both a tension and a vitality that is not found in the comparatively 'safer' shaman dance. In contrast, the energy of shaman dance is more 'metaphysical' rather than 'physical' wherein the performance is more concerned with the receiving of 'spirits' and healing through magic.

Elsewhere, however, this 'loose' interpretation of contact improvisation in terms of a method of exploring physical contact between dancers (whether it is simply touching or more complex lifts and balances) inspires a reassessment of how to interpret the movement quality of Nam's *Pallae*. In the chapter devoted to the analysis of *Pallae*, the work was read as an example of Korean modern dance and, as such, traces its roots to the technique developed by practitioners such as Martha Graham. As this analysis of the choreography of *Movement Experience* and *O* will suggest, however, much can be gained from forging links between these two works and *Pallae* in terms of the use of contact improvisation elements.

In addition to the 'abstract' approach to choreography developed by Rosemary Butcher and the exploration of the body's physical energy in contact improvisation, I also studied the 'Five Rhythm' technique of Gabriel Russ. The five rhythms - 'flowing', 'lyrical', 'stillness', 'chaos' and 'staccato' - are used as a basis for improvised

movement. Unlike the Butcher and contact improvisation workshops, the Russ classes were not specifically aimed at professional dancers. As a result, the greater variety of ages and body sizes demonstrated clearly the extent to which the same gesture or movement can take on a different quality or dynamic according to the person who executes it. Alongside this 'rhythm-based' technique, I also studied the Feldenkrais method wherein the 'natural' movements of babies are used as a means of getting the dancing body to move in a lyrical and 'unforced' way. As with all the other movement techniques studied, a great deal of emphasis is given to 'body awareness' and sensitivity rather than willing or 'forcing' the body to perform pre-set and 'unnatural' movements.

The various forms of improvised movement I explored while in Britain contrasted dramatically with a ballet and Graham based dance education previously pursued in Korea. Curiously, however, the sense of freedom and spontaneity provided through these contemporary codes seemed, to some extent, familiar in that these are also elements of traditional Korean dance. Improvisation, as Novack (1990) observes, is not a dance form itself but rather a method through which an existing vocabulary can be expanded. In that respect, what the various improvisatory methods provided was a means through which what was already familiar (and, to some extent, sacred) could be partially deconstructed and then, through a workshop method, reconstructed in new and surprising ways.

Novack goes on to describe the various ways in which improvisation can contribute to dance performance. She suggests it can break down the boundary between the performer and the spectator. Not surprisingly, as her research into improvisation begins



from its social dance origins in 1960s America, she fails to recognise how this performance technique was already being used as a means of communication between dancers and audiences centuries earlier in Eastern cultures.

Improvisation-based rehearsal processes have, throughout the twentieth century, become one of the most popular strategies amongst contemporary dance companies in the west. This situation can be traced back to three closely related reasons. First, improvisation can be a means of re-examining existing dance vocabularies. Second, the sense of freedom it offers can contribute to the breakdown of more traditional hierarchical student/teacher relationships. Third, improvisation offers an alternative to a system wherein all the dancers in the company have to adapt to the requirements of a set dance code. This, in turn, provides space in which dancers can explore a sense of expressive individuality. In other words, rather than the dancer being 'moulded' by the dance, it is the dance itself that is adapted to suit the specifics of the dancer's body.

Another aspect of improvisation I discovered, and was greatly inspired by throughout this period of study, was how it not only 're-invented' an understanding of ballet and modern dance but how it occasionally bypassed this training altogether and provided a different, and 'fresher', perspective on traditional Korean dance. As a result, it was no longer necessary to continue to view my working practice in terms of bridging a gap between 'eastern' and 'western' culture and 'traditional' and 'contemporary' practice but, instead, as a deconstruction of dichotomous thinking. It was this notion of a breakdown of boundaries that I wanted to both exploit in the creation of, and examine in the analysis of, the two dance works, *Movement Experience* and *O*.

## 9.2. *Movement Experience* (1999).

The premiere of *Movement Experience*, along with two other works *Travelling* and *Watersound*, took place at the Edinburgh Dance Centre as part of the Fringe Festival in 1999.<sup>1</sup> The general title for all three works was *Korean Red Fires*. The company consisted of four female dancers, three of whom were Korean and the other was Asian British (her parents having immigrated to England from Hong Kong). Each of these women came from a different dance background including ballet, Korean traditional dance, contact improvisation and Graham technique. The reason for this variety in the company was important as the aim in the work was to explore how, and to what extent, the proximity of these different movement vocabularies could destabilise both the east/west and traditional/contemporary dichotomies. The accompaniment for the work was pre-recorded drumming that was designed to be 'low-key', rhythmically simple and, hence, unobtrusive.

There was no separation between the stage and the audience area. Instead of chairs, the spectators were given a piece of paper that they could sit on anywhere in the space. Each piece of paper had the word '*chi*' written on it. There were three reasons for this: first, to keep the spectator's eye-line low; second, to lend the work an informality and third, to bring a certain sense of Korean tradition to the performance. Korean spectators are expected to sit on the floor while they observe traditional Korean dance performances. Unlike traditional Korean dance, however, when the audience first enter the space in *Movement Experience* the music is already playing and the four female dancers are in position.

One dancer stands at the side of the performance space, another is lying on her back with her legs resting on a chair that is set in the middle of the space. The third dancer is walking around in circles in a very small space while the fourth dancer is standing facing a wall with one arm stretched overhead. As soon as the audience is settled, one of the dancers approaches an audience member and, holding their hand, leads them to the side of the space. Although the choice of 'victim' is spontaneous, for each performance a relatively tall man was chosen. The reason for this was because the dancer then leans against his back so someone who could easily support the dancer's weight was required.

While leaning against the male spectator, the dancer gently moves her head and torso in a gentle rolling action while keeping contact with the man's back. This short sequence, was a means of creating a physical intimacy between the performers and the audience as well as lending the entire work a tension borne of uncertainty. Furthermore, this opening activity was meant to bridge an east/west and traditional/contemporary divide by fusing shamanistic 'healing' with contact improvisation.

At the same time as this short dancer/spectator duet is occurring, another dancer begins to dance with a chair. As with the male spectator, the chair becomes a passive yet strong support for a sequence of movements and poses that would be otherwise impossible.

While the first dancer's choreography is focused on her upper body, however, the second dancer explores various leg movements and balances.

Throughout these two duets, the third female dancer continues her somewhat somnambulistic circular walking pattern. Her focus is on exploring the various different



ways the feet can be used while making small steps. As this choreography is on a small-scale, her feet are projected onto several screens that are placed around the performance space. The final dancer, who was originally facing the wall, begins to walk across the space while lifting her arm and then bringing it down towards her chest.

Each of the four dancers has their own choreographic focus; either head, legs, feet or arms. For each dancer the range and scale of the movements are kept as simple as possible. There is no investment in any demonstrations of technical expertise or even any attempt to draw the spectator's focus. Although each seems to be performing in their own personal kinesphere, however, occasional eye contact is made between the dancers. There are two reasons for this. First, and on a comparatively mundane level, it acts as a means of making sure that all the dancers are relatively synchronized with each other. Second, it is a means of creating a sense of communitarianism within the company through which *chi* can be transferred and a *yin-yang* balance maintained. For example, if the movement level of three of the dancers is low, the fourth dancer needs to make her movement high. If a dancer sees that the others' movement is too slow, she can then move faster.

At the beginning part of the work, each dancer explores a relatively small kinesphere. As the work progresses, however, this area slowly expands until all four dancers come together at the centre of the space and create a *tableau* (see figure 10 on the following page).



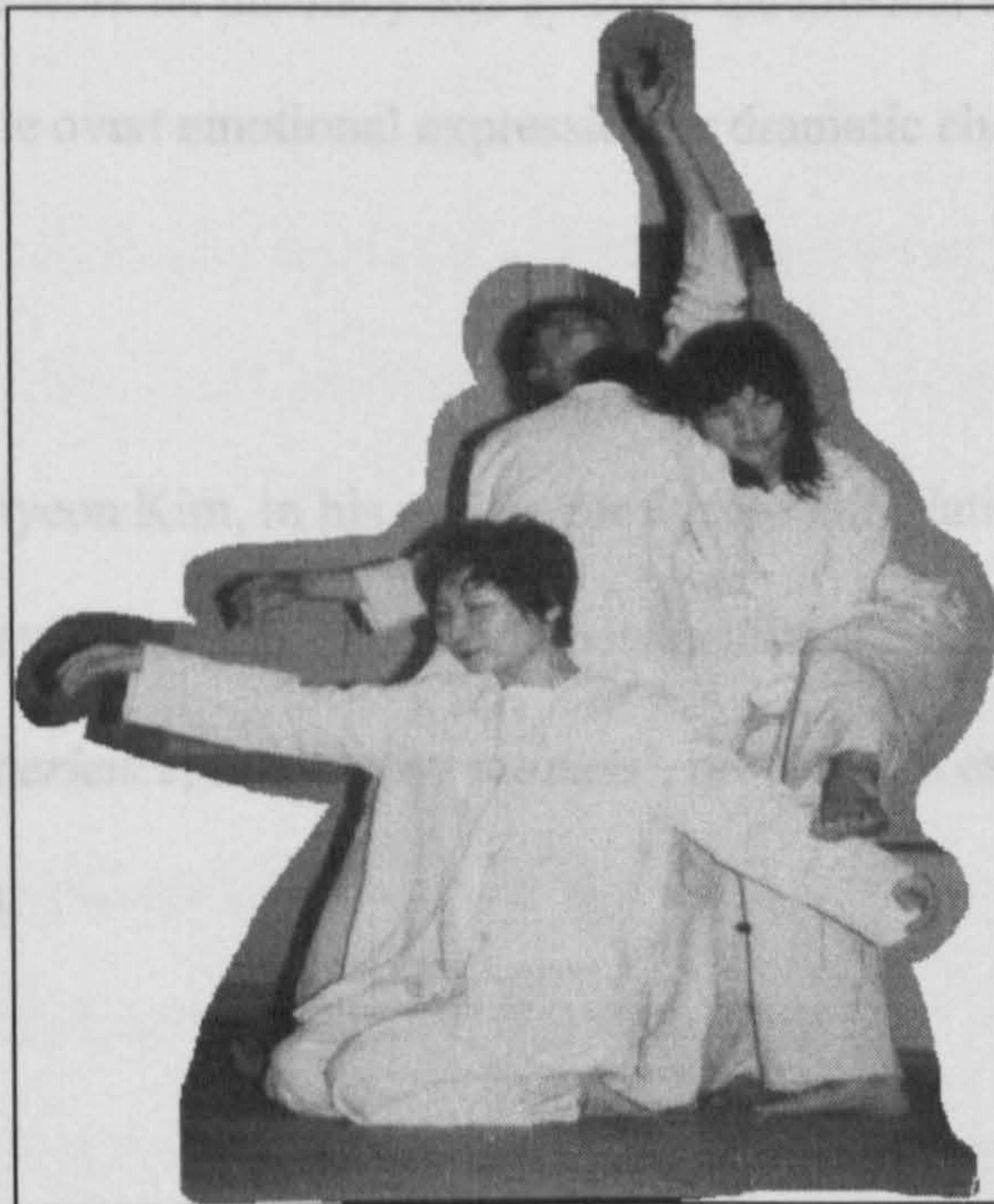


Figure 10: *Movement Experience*.

The culmination of the work sees one of the dancers shake her head rapidly from side to side. This activity is inspired by the final moment of a shaman ritual when the performer is supposed to be receiving the spirit into their body. The lights gradually fade during this activity marking the end of the performance.

The choreographic impetus behind *Movement Experience* was the exploration of notions of 'fragmentation' and 'flow'. To that end, the performance is constructed from a series of relatively simple gestures that, because they are focused on the head, arms, feet or legs, fracture the body into four seemingly independent sections. At the same time, combining repetition with subtle variation provided a sense of fluidity.

Furthermore, and to lend the work a tension, the movement material itself was



improvised. To lend the work an intimacy and serenity the musical accompaniment was kept to a minimum while overt emotional expression or dramatic change in dynamism were avoided.

The dance critic Chae-hyeon Kim, in his review for the Korean National Arts Journal *Minjok Yesul*, concentrates upon this interaction between fragmentation and fluidity. For him, *Movement Experience*, in its 'abstract-ness', provides an escape from 'meaning'. He explains,

The movement does not aim to achieve any sense of unity. However, there is a unity based on a simple rhythm, which is a quiet drum's sound. The dancers' movement experiences, in which the dancers are free to explore their own movements, give audiences a sense of emancipation. We can find a meaning of no-meaning through the movements of bending the upper body, lowering their upper body, small walking steps, and the dancer 2's moving of one leg.

(October 1999: 81, translation)

Kim goes on to describe how the relaxed spines and joints of the dancers lends the entire work a soft and gentle quality. The original intention was that that movements should somehow take on the characteristics of gently flowing water. According to much Asian mythology water is associated with women (while men are fire). Furthermore, water is not only essential for life but is an important constituent to healing practices.<sup>2</sup> This 'liquid' quality, based on 'loose and improvisational movement', Kim suggests, 'looks like a strategy of her [Cho's] choreography'. Furthermore, he adds, *Movement Experience* is not a 'watched' but 'felt' dance wherein more orthodox aspects of dance



performance such as technical ability and physical strength are replaced by more nebulous attributes such as 'atmosphere' and 'spirituality'. This, he explains, results from a fusion of eastern traditional and more western contemporary practice in that the meditative quality of shaman dance serves to temper the more vigorous and dynamic aspects of contact improvisation.

Elsewhere, the Korean cultural correspondent Eun-jeong Kwon (1999) also identifies a process of fusion in *Movement Experience*. She remarks how the work challenges the traditional spectator/performer barrier through the use of physical contact. She also identifies a blending of traditional (Korean) and contemporary (western) practice in respect to the performance space and the informal seating arrangement for the audience.<sup>3</sup>

Donald Hutera, however, does not share this interpretation of *Movement Experience*, in his short review of *Korean Red Fires* for *The Scotsman* (25/8/1999). He states,

This programme of three placid or peculiar dances by Ki Sook Cho's Ki Dance Company seems misnamed. Where is the fire? Perhaps it is in the varied percussion solos of Dae Whan Kim, more than getting by with a western drum kit for the opening performance (his Korean drum was lost in transit).

The audience sits on the floor. A spotlight slowly activated four women, still as statues and dressed in white. Each has a particular movement quality: light-footed, jiggling, twitching, stretched. Although they never acknowledge one another, all move with pliant softness. At the end they assemble into a human sculpture.

Although it would be a mistake to make generalisations concerning differences between 'east' and 'west' based on these reviews, certain key aspects cannot be completely ignored. Furthermore, as part of an ongoing project to find a relevant Korean dance vocabulary that has both an intercultural dimension as well as an indigenous specificity, much can be learned from these critical responses.

While both of the Korean reviewers are seemingly able to recognise not only references to traditional dance practice but also how they have been modified through the incorporation of western dance elements, Huttera remains mystified. Instead, he is reduced to providing a simple formal description of the choreography.

This contrast between an eastern 'recognition' and a western 'confusion' begs the question, to what extent does *Movement Experience* challenge the east/west and traditional/contemporary divisions? Just how 'intercultural' is this work? In order to answer this question, certain elements of the performance need to be addressed according to three criteria. First, in respect to their cultural origin, second, how they are altered through an investment in contact improvisation technique and third, how they compare to aspects of a work created and performed in Korea; Nam's *Pallae*.

For example, *Movement Experience* is replete with references to eastern traditional dance practice including sitting on the floor for the spectators, the musical accompaniment and costume. Although these aspects, if read independently, could not be said to be uniquely Korean, when set in the context of a work that is not only danced

by four eastern dancers under the general heading *Korean Red Fires*, then their cultural identity becomes hard to ignore. Furthermore, the potency of these 'Korean' factors has the effect of rendering almost invisible all western references in the work.

Perhaps one of the main faults with this work was a level of presumption wherein not enough consideration was given to geographic/cultural difference. This work was performed, not in Korea, but in Britain. This, in turn, has an impact on the level of expectation of the spectators. Although there were many Koreans in the audience for the Edinburgh premiere, they were 'westernised' Koreans who, it could be suggested, might have some experience of western dance. In contrast, western members of the audience, it can be argued, are less likely to have had much exposure to traditional Korean dance performance.

Such generalisations notwithstanding, not enough thought was given to the spectator/performer relationship. Instead of cultural difference being confronted, it was virtually ignored. In other words, in *Movement Experience*, interculturalism is transformed into a curious process of 'inverse' colonialism wherein what was previously 'western' (contact improvisation) is passed through a heavy Korean 'filter'. Instead of deconstructing the boundaries between 'eastern' and 'western' codes, what takes place is a form of re-invention wherein a contemporary 'Korean' dance vocabulary is produced through the absorption of non-indigenous practices.

This Korean 'will to power' is also reflected in the treatment of the spectators in the performance. There is an almost unavoidable sensation that, rather than being 'met half-



way', the audience are expected to comply with a traditional Korean practice by sitting on the floor. Ironically, even in Korea, most dance performances are now held in theatre venues complete with seating. Not only is the 'western' based audience expected to behave according to a Korean code, but also to one that, even in Korea, is no longer being followed. For example, for *Pallae*, the spectators are seated and 'look down' upon the performance.

Another major difference between *Movement Experience* and *Pallae* in terms of their respective performance/audience relationship is that, while in *Pallae* there remains a clear division between the two, in *Movement Experience* it is continually broken. For *Pallae*, intimacy is nurtured through an investment in humour and eroticism while for *Movement Experience* it is created through the lack of a clear division between performance and spectator space and actual physical contact. Paradoxically perhaps, and as the British review suggests, the proximity between spectator and dancer in *Movement Experience* does not correspond to greater communication. Rather, and like two identical poles on a magnet, in an attempt to 'will' them together, the result was more repulsion than attraction.

As an example of intercultural practice, there were many fundamental problems with *Movement Experience*. Predominant amongst these was a lack of attention to differences in audience perception and an insensitive approach to the 'fusion' of traditional Korean and contemporary western performance codes. To that end, the concern in the next work, *O* (2000), was twofold. First, greater awareness of socio-cultural specificity (especially in respect to the performer/spectator relationship) and,

second, a shift from the notion of a 'willed fusion' and towards that of dialogical process.

### 9.3. *O* (2000).

*O* was created for the 'Far Forward' project and sponsored by a Regional Lottery Fund. Six works by six different choreographers were performed at three London theatre venues; The Studio, The Waterman and The Bull. Each work was chosen on the basis of its innovative approach to dance performance. This formed the basis of the publicity material:

Utilising theatricality and form alongside brand new movement, this is the closest it gets to the edge. ... (All of the pieces have been specially created for this inspiring performance--- a unique opportunity to catch next year's work now).

(Programme note of 'Far Forward' 2000)

Two female dancers and one male actor perform *O*. Apart from myself, the other female dancer is German and is trained in contact improvisation. The male performer, who is not trained in dance, acts as a narrator. The title of the work, *O*, is used for several reasons. It is meant to refer to the circle of nature from birth to death and re-birth and so on as well as a 'zero'; nothing, emptiness, the void. It is also the sound made in meditation, a breathing technique that has been practiced in the east for centuries as an aid to relaxation, concentration or contemplation.

The reference to non-western cultural practice is also reflected in the structure of the work, which is based on Korean mask and shaman dance.<sup>4</sup> As with most shaman performances, *O* is in three parts: *apuri* - the invitation of the theatrical world and purification; *bonpuri* - the main performance and; *duepuri* - uniting the communitarian consciousness of the performer and audience. For *O*, *bonpuri* is in two halves. There is no musical accompaniment for *apuri* while live drumming is used for *bonpuri I* and recorded Korean music composed by Young Dong Kim for *bonpuri II*.

At the beginning of the work (*apuri*) the male narrator walks amongst the audience and proclaims 'isn't Oxford Street busy!' Over his t-shirt and jeans he is wearing a long piece of fabric that resembles a skirt. To add to the gender ambiguity of this character he deliberately speaks in a high-pitched voice. Focusing on one member of the audience (chosen at random but most frequently a woman), he approaches saying 'what a lovely flower'. He then proceeds to smell the spectator's head.

According to Cynthia J. Novack (1990: 122), physical contact between the performer and the spectator is an easy means towards informality wherein the 'tacit inclusion of the audience' in the performance creates an intimacy and sense of communalism. As the analysis of *Movement Experience* suggested, however, this is not always true. It is not enough to simply make contact with the audience, more important is the manner in which this contact is made. Therefore, while in *Movement Experience* the medium was unspoken touch and the code was 'abstract movement', in *O*, the medium was comedy and the code was spoken English. In other words, rather than invoke 'tension' through



proximity, the Narrator is able to dissipate it. Having, therefore, got the audience 'on his side', the narrator then invites them into his 'imaginary' world.

He executes a mime sequence that is meant to represent narrowly avoiding being hit by a car, after which he exclaims 'what a fucking driver, car, city.' He then proceeds to describe how it has started to rain and, while pretending to look for a place to shelter, remarks 'what fucking English weather.' Having 'found' a corner of a building he then moves away complaining of a horrible smell. He then spies someone else in the audience. This is one of the female dancers. He explains that this dancer is actually a dog that he would like to train and so shouts orders such as 'stay' and 'sit'. He then throws a ball and calls 'fetch'. The dancer (as the dog) scurries across the performance space to retrieve the ball. At this point, the other dancer appears, looks at the audience and asks 'what the hell is going on?' The lights fade to mark the end of this part of the performance.

The use of comic speech in this beginning part of *O* is derived from Korean mask dance.<sup>5</sup> As Dong-il Cho (1975) explains, mask dance is often used to ridicule and satirise the aristocratic classes. In so doing, he adds, it is able to not only strengthen the unity of the working class but also invoke an intimacy borne of mutual concern between spectators and performers. As such, it is replete with coarse and vulgar language as well as crude caricatures of the wealthy and politically powerful. It is this tradition that is exploited at the beginning of *O* as a means of creating a light-hearted atmosphere and communality between performers and spectators; this is why the narrator and the dancer as the dog move among the audience.

This comic introduction contrasts sharply with the more serious and quasi-ritualistic concerns of the main part of the performance: *Bonpuri I*. One of the female dancers, crouched over and covered in a white sheet, pretends to be a table at the centre of the stage. The narrator is standing at the down stage left corner. He lights a candle, takes it to the 'table', and returns to his previous position. A dancer, who was sat amongst the audience, moves to the centre of the stage. She is dressed in a shaman costume. She puts some money on a plate that is set in front of the table and bows repeatedly. The narrator speaks; 'if anyone has got wishes or feels sick, mentally or physically, please come on stage and bow to the table'. At the Studio and Waterman Theatre performances no one took up this offer. At the last performance at The Bull, however, three Korean members of the audience came to the stage and bowed deeply.

The narrator also bows to the 'table' and remains in this position while the 'shaman' begins to dance. She accompanies herself on a set of small cymbals called *bara*. The simple rhythm is taken from traditional shaman ritual. Although the choreography looks relatively simple, the stepping pattern subtly and continually changes.

Her knees remain bent throughout the dance while her head and arms move gently from side to side and up and down. The suggestion is that the 'shaman' is trying to invoke a spirit through her performance. She then climbs onto the narrator's back, at which point the choreography becomes faster and livelier. To signify the point at which she 'receives' the spirit she climbs down off the narrator's back and walks to the 'table'.

The lights gradually dim and the dancer removes her shaman costume.

*Bonpuri II* is the longest part of *O*. The lights fade up to reveal the dancer who had previously performed as the shaman lying face down over the table. Music plays and a duet between this dancer and the one who has pretended to be the table begins. The choreography incorporates aspects of Western contact improvisation. For example, while in this prone position the underneath dancer begins to crawl across the floor on her hands and knees. While she moves, the top dancer gradually slides to the floor.

By leaning on each other, both dancers manage to get to their feet at which point they proceed to make contact by gently touching various parts of the other's body; hands against back, feet against shoulder or head against hands. Sometimes the contact is simply a touch or a sharing of body-weight (such as a leaning action) while at other times it involves different levels of support and manipulation. For example, while one dancer is on her hands and knees she gently lifts one leg up behind her. At this point the other dancer holds on to her foot and carefully leans forward.

The proximity between the two dancers in this duet emphasises their physical difference; one being tall and pale and the other shorter and darker. According to an eastern traditional code, however, this contrast conforms to a *yin-yang* sense of harmonic balance.<sup>6</sup> This notion is further emphasised through the choreography wherein (as with *Movement Experience*) when one dancer is standing, the other sits and when one is moving her arm, the other uses her leg. Also, both dancers alternate between a supported and supporting role in the duet and assist each other to achieve balances that, without help, would be impossible to sustain. In other words, in a duet between one tall



and white dancer and the other short and dark, it is not only necessary to avoid any suggestion of racial or cultural hierarchy but also to articulate a concept of mutual dependence.

This mutuality is further enhanced by the 'inward focus' of the choreography. While sharing an intimate kinesphere, there is little acknowledgement of the audience. This process of internalisation, accompanied by the gentle yet consistent movement, lends the duet a meditative quality. Furthermore, this exploration of an 'internal' dynamic is fundamental to both Korean shaman dance and contact improvisation. In both forms, the emotional quality of the performance is nurtured through an attention to the exchange of energy. While in shaman dance this energy (*chi*) is passed between performer and 'spirit' on a metaphysical plane, in contact improvisation it flows between the dancers through direct physical contact. Elsewhere, a similar means of invoking an intimate atmosphere between the dancers can also be recognised in *Pallae*; use of an inward focus and almost complete disregard of the audience, prolonged physical contact between the women dancers and a gentle fluid movement style.

In *O*, the gentle and intimate choreography brings the two dancers to the centre of the stage at which point the taller of the two dancers assumes her previous table posture. The shorter dancer then removes a long white scarf from round her waist, stands behind the other, and waves the scarf up and down. Throughout this duet, the narrator remains in his forward bowing position. When the dancer begins to wave her scarf, he then moves behind her and, removing his own scarf from his waist, copies this waving gesture. All three dancers shake and begin to recite vowel-sounds in a long sustained drone.

The final part of *O* (*duepuri*) is, as with Korean mask or shaman dance, a celebration that invites the audience to participate in singing, dancing, drinking. For *O* it also acts as a moment where the audience can comment upon the work. This uplifting 'communal' conclusion previously used in *For My Country, For My Dance* (1987), *Korea! My Love* (1989) and *Korea! My Love II* (1990) is, in *O*, taken further in that it can take place in a different place such as a public house or restaurant.

#### 9.4. Conclusion.

There are several key differences between *Movement Experience* and *O*. First, the ethnic background of the performers. In *Movement Experience*, all the performers were eastern while in *O*, one of the two female dancers was western. Second, the use of comic speech in *O* as a means of creating an intimate and communal atmosphere through which the more 'Korean' aspects of the performance could be introduced. Third, the relationship between the choreographic vocabularies. While *Movement Experience* is based on an improvised approach to both Korean and western dance codes, *O* is predominantly based on contact improvisation. Fourth, for *O*, the audience was allowed to sit on chairs.

Many of the changes in approach to performance were due to an ongoing process of discovery wherein the goal was to create a movement vocabulary that retained identifiable eastern traditional while absorbing more contemporary western characteristics. This, I hoped, would not only contribute to the development of a relevant and socially sensitive Korean dance culture, but would also contribute to the



strengthening of intercultural links. Previous excursions into this strategy had centred around a process of 'fusion' wherein it was believed that both eastern and western performance codes could be somehow 'detached' from their original cultural and historical moorings and then simply 'willed' into being combined in order to create a new 'intercultural' vocabulary.

As the critical response to *Movement Experience* suggests, however, this 'fusion' process is not without problems. For example while it was possible for the Korean critics to identify an intercultural dimension to the work, for the western reviewer, the whole experience was one of confusion. Consequently, rather than simply trying to 'ignore' east/west differences, for *O*, the desire was to create a dialogue between them. To that end, of concern was making sure that *O* was based on an 'even playing field'. This involved not only the use of clearly eastern traditional (the shaman ritual) and western (English speech and contact improvisation) characteristic elements, but also highlighting such contrasts by using one eastern and one western female dancer. Furthermore, and as was claimed in the analysis of *Pallae*, fundamental to the creation of an 'intercultural' practice is the relationship between the dancers and the audience. While *Movement Experience* used physical proximity, however, both *Pallae* and *O* explored humour.

My understanding of 'interculturalism' as a choreographic impetus has, while working in Britain, undergone a significant change. What has become ever more clear is that it is not possible to simply see 'interculturalism' as some 'innocent' blending of 'east' and 'west'. As the close analysis of *Movement Experience* and *O* suggest, rather than trying



to simply collapse barriers (and hence ignore or erase what is unique to different cultures), what is more important is to celebrate such differences. Intercultural performance practice has, then, shifted from its (Korean) post-colonial origins wherein the concern was to restore tradition and expel western influence into a more transcultural dialogical platform wherein inspiration is taken from exploiting, rather than trying to stifle, difference.

The following Chapter Ten will present a conclusive overview of the development of the relationship between interculturalism as both practice and ideology. In particular, the process of choreography will be interpreted as it exists within, and comments upon, contemporaneous thinking on such concepts as interculturalism and transculturalism as well as a shift from a contextual post-colonial political directive towards a co-textual postmodern aesthetic concern.

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<sup>1</sup> The Korean Information Service provided financial support.

<sup>2</sup> 1999, my homepage <http://members.tripod.co.uk/dancecho>

<sup>3</sup> See *Hankyeore* 21, 09/09/1999.

<sup>4</sup> See 2.3.

<sup>5</sup> See 2.4.1.

<sup>6</sup> See 2.4.4.

## **Chapter Ten.**

## **Conclusion.**



In its wider sense, the original purpose of this exposition was to investigate the status of Korean dance culture at the end of the twentieth century and to try and imagine how it might continue to develop into the twenty-first. More specifically, through a close analysis of a number of dance works, of concern was to what extent and in what ways, Korean choreographers are trying to develop a dance style that has both an identifiable indigenous character yet simultaneously can be read as embracing an intercultural strategy.

The impetus behind this course of investigation, as outlined in the introduction to this study, is based on a concern with what many cultural theorists believe to be the erosion of a National cultural identity due to the impact of colonialism and rapid Euro-American led modernisation. Although Korea was under Japanese colonial rule, Japan had itself been previously remodelled according to a western template. As such, the modernising influence that Japan exerted upon Korea throughout the twentieth century was of European origin. To that end, while colonialism introduced industrial development and a general increase in the standard of living, it did this at the expense of replacing Korea's cultural heritage with a more westernised one. This, as has been claimed in this study and elsewhere, is Eurocentrism; the 'underside of modernisation'. As has been argued, this is the influence that, if Korean dance culture is to discover its own identity, needs to be 'overcome'.

As was also explained in the introduction, to 'overcome' is not a simple matter of removing all things non-Korean. There are two reasons, it was suggested, why this would not work. First, the 'Eurocentric effect' is so widespread and so overwhelming that it is no longer possible to completely separate the two. Second, such a blanket

rejectionist policy can only be detrimental as it risks losing some of the more positive and contributory western cultural influences and, worse, could transform Korea into an isolated xenophobic and ultra-Nationalist state. To 'overcome' then, does necessitate a retrogressive strategy but, rather, addressing the intricate and multi-stranded relationship between east and west as well as the traditional and the modern (contemporary) as it exists today. In other words, a possible remedial approach to the demise of Korean cultural identity and its practices could be found through a process of intercultural interaction. To this end, each of the works studied in this exposition was analysed according to a specific model. Of concern was how, and to what extent, both eastern and western elements could be identified in the chosen dance works and whether such interaction could be read as contributing to the development of a relevant yet historically sensitive Korean dance culture.

There is another closely related reason for undergoing this investigation; a certain 'gap' in Korean dance scholarship. In comparison to the wealth of anthropological examinations into traditional Korean dance forms, there remains an acute paucity of studies into more recent and experimental practice. Furthermore, of these, fewer still are concerned with addressing interculturalism either in terms of subject matter or methodological approach. In this respect, Korean dance scholarship has yet to fully embrace some of the more current thought on such notions as 'interculturalism', 'cross-culturalism', 'intraculturalism' and so on being expressed elsewhere. This investigation is, therefore, aimed towards contributing to the correcting this imbalance, both through the choice of subject matter and also the analytical model adopted.



Due to a lack of Korean-based supportive debate, one of the primary concerns of this study was the formation of a useful methodological framework that would provide a 'post-colonial' context to the subsequent analyses. The reason for such a strategy is, it was suggested, based on an understanding of dance practice as an 'object' that exists within, and interacts with, its specific historio-cultural background. Furthermore, one of the outcomes of the colonisation of one culture (and its practices) by another (or many others) is the eventual loss of what is original or 'pre-colonial'. To this end, it was believed, the purpose of post-colonial dance practice is not so much a process of recovery (a nostalgic pursuit) but, rather, the exploration of both theory and practice as a response to Eurocentric (and tacitly universalist) ideology. As such, and following a theoretical model elsewhere developed by Pavis, the concern became with in what ways and to what extent it was possible to imagine new means of reacting to old-fashioned Imperial attitudes concerning gender, race and class in Korean Post-colonial dance works. More specifically, the question became, to what extent is it possible to read Post-colonial choreography in terms of a 'back-lash' against a pro-western standardisation of identity politics and aesthetics?

This exposition was divided into three Parts. In order to locate the analyses of dance works into a relevant socio-historical context, Part One was concerned with addressing the development and characteristics of Korean dance. As was explained in Chapter One, however, the term 'Korean dance' is so general as to be a misnomer. As such, it was subsequently divided into five sub-categories: traditional Korean dance, Korean Creative dance, New dance, modern dance and ballet.



Chapter Two then focused on the various forms of traditional Korean dance and described how, under Japanese colonial rule they were relegated to a secondary or 'low art status' in comparison to non-indigenous 'high art' dance forms such as ballet. This process formed one part of a wider 'civilising' strategy wherein all Korean practices were labelled as 'backward' and too reminiscent of a pre-colonial feudal society. For example, during Japanese rule shaman temples were closed in an attempt to wipe out what was considered to be nothing more than the practice of superstition.

Although previously subject to severe censorship, Shaman dance still survives and is still performed in Korea. As such, it was used as a means of exemplifying many of the characteristics of traditional Korean dance practice. While recognising the debate that surrounds the interpretation of 'tradition' (in that, it risks invoking a nostalgic or 'rose-tinted' view of the past), 'traditional' concepts as 'communitarianism', '*he-bang* and *he-chae*', '*chi*' and '*yin-yang*' were discussed in detail. Furthermore, other aspects that, although not specific to traditional Korean dance such as 'magical realism' and the performer/spectator dynamic, can be used as interpretative tools, were also addressed.

As many Korean dance anthropologists discussed in Part One contend, however, due to a series of major historical events such as Japanese colonialism, the Korean War and subsequent partition of the peninsula, Korean 'traditional' dance has undergone many changes. This, in turn, adds another cautionary condition to the tendency to regard traditional Korean dance as being a stable and easily definable entity. Rather, and as has been argued in some recent western dance scholarship, there is a pressing need to move away from regarding 'historical' dance forms as static 'museum-pieces'.

This ideology, it is now claimed, risks denying both dance and the dancing body agency which, in turn, raises the spectre of essentialism.

While some Korean scholars continue to both lament upon the loss of, or disagree as to the categorisation of, an indigenous dance heritage, others are more concerned with how, and to what extent, 'traditional' dance codes can be used to contribute to the construction of a socially relevant and dynamic Korean dance culture. One of the early outcomes of this desire to re-invest in 'tradition' was the formation of the National Dance Movement in the early 1980s.

Chapter Three traced the development of the Korean National Dance Movement throughout the 1980s and 90s. In particular, attention was focused on how the Movement exploited the Mask Dance tradition as an agit-propaganda vehicle against the prevailing authoritarian government. The use of traditional dance elements as a means of satirising oppressive regimes is the subject of the discussion of Ae-ju Lee's 'underground' performance of *Barammaji* (1987). The chapter concludes with a discussion of what impact the change from authoritarianism to democracy in the 1990s had upon the political aspirations of Korean National Dance practitioners.

Having outlined how National Dance works have exploited either a pro-Nationalist and pro-traditionalist strategy or a more decentring and intercultural approach in order to overcome the hierarchical legacy of colonialism, to what extent these two different ideologies could be read in three works was the concern in Part Two.

Each chapter in Part Two was devoted to an analysis of a contemporary Korean dance work. The first of these, an example of Korean Creative dance, is Sang-gun Han's *Kkocksin (Flower Shoes, 1999)*. This is a work that explores the relationship between three identical Korean brides and their future husbands, one of whom is played by the choreographer. As such, and pursuing an intercultural strategy, of concern in this analysis was the extent to which this work's use of both eastern and western dance codes in order to represent Korean femininity could contribute to the development of a culturally sensitive Korean dance culture. Ultimately, it was argued, a heavy investment in quasi-romantic iconography and an old-fashioned Patriarchal concept of the woman as a silent and passive victim, instead of enhancing contemporary Korean dance practice, could more readily be understood as undermining it.

Chapter Five presented an investigation into how a well-known, representative choreographer, Jung-hee Lee incorporates aspects of both traditional Korean and modern Western dance into a work that explores both the Korean War and the subsequent division of the peninsula, *Salpuri 9 (1992)*. This is a modern dance work that incorporates a traditional shaman device to 'summon' on stage the spirits of the victims of the Korean War. Through a close examination of movement material, read through the lens of other contemporaneous socio-cultural texts, the concern was to what extent *Salpuri 9* could be read as an anti-Eurocentric expression of intercultural practice.

This analysis of Jung hee Lee's *Salpuri 9* focused on her dialogical use of both eastern traditional and western contemporary dance vocabularies in a work that explored the difficulties faced by a post-war Korean populace. By adopting and adapting Adshead



Lansdale's intertextual model to the reading of this dance work, several key factors were identified. First, rather than exposing differences between 'Eastern' and 'Western' and 'traditional' and 'contemporary' practice and aesthetics, this analysis revealed a great deal of similarity almost to the point where such rigid polarities become virtually obsolete. Further to this notion of dance as an intercultural practice, it was suggested, what this work also seemed to convey is not only the extent to which both eastern and western dance vocabularies could benefit through proximity but also, how, through their integration, key commonalities could be revealed. For example, although this work was meant to be specific to the Korean War, its 'cross-cultural' movement vocabulary suggested that such social, geographical and historical specifics are merely consequential rather than determinate. In other words, conflict and suffering are universal and it is this that *Salpuri 9's* choreography conveys.

In Chapter Six, Chung-ho Nam's *Pallae* ('Laundry', 1993), was analysed. *Pallae* is a dance for five women and explores the ways in which they interact while they are occupied with their laundry. Of concern was to what extent this work could be interpreted as a more optimistic and forward-looking contribution to the development of a relevant and socially responsive Korean dance culture. Moreover, as this is a work that deals specifically with the behaviour of a small group of women, away from the controlling influence of men, key was in what ways some of the more stereotypical (and quasi-Imperialist) codes of gender representation articulated in other Korean dance works are here problematised.

After a brief discussion of Nams' contribution to 1980s Korean dance and a description of key movement and structural elements of the work, this analysis

addressed a number of specific concerns. First, set within a relevant gender discourse, the extent to which the work addressed the 'phallocentric configurations' of 'traditional' Korean society were discussed. Second, in what ways this could be interpreted according to a 'pro-feminist' challenge to some of the more orthodox, and patriarchal, codes of gender representation were then explored. Third, and set within a cross-cultural discourse on gender, of concern was the extent to which this work could be read as a uniquely Korean 'take' on issues surrounding the representation of women in dance. Moreover, how this corresponds to the development of a movement vocabulary that, although intercultural in construction, retained an identifiable indigenous character was addressed.

Having analysed works by other Korean practitioners in Part Two, Part Three was devoted to the investigation of my own choreographic practice. While Chapter Seven and Eight were concerned with works created and premiered in Korea, Chapter Nine presented an analysis of two works that were produced in Britain. In Chapter Seven, three works, *For My Country, For My Dance* (1987), *Korea! My Love* (1989) and *Korea! My Love II* (1990), that, as part of the National Dance Movement, deal with important events in recent Korean history were analysed. In a continuation of the strategy deployed in Part Two, of concern in this chapter, therefore, was the extent to which these works could be read as contributing to the ongoing development of a relevant and socially responsive contemporary Korean dance culture.

The predominant performance methodology during this period with the National Dance Movement was to address issues relevant to Korea by using a predominantly 'traditional' dance vocabulary. In that way, it was believed, an indigenous dance

culture could be nurtured that would also see the preservation of its heritage. The three works examined in this chapter follow this tactic. Furthermore, the working practice applied to these works closely resembles that used by Sang-gun Han in *Kkocksin* (1999), a comparative strategy was employed. To that end, both similarities and differences between working procedures, and how this impacts upon the way in which issues are represented, were considered.

As was argued in the analysis of *Kkocksin*, one of the most noticeable downsides to both an agit-prop approach to performance and a desire to support indigenous dance legacy was the sacrifice of creativity. Although, it was suggested, some practitioners might be able to combine an imaginative approach to choreography with controversial subject matter, this was not the case in respect to these three works. Ultimately, it was decided that, in *For My Country, For My Dance, Korea! My Love* and *Korea! My Love II*, in the relationship between politics and aesthetics, too much emphasis was given to the message and not enough to the creative impulse. Moreover, this use of dance as a political platform, although considered culturally important at the time, has, in retrospect, looked increasingly naïve and oversimplistic.

The three works discussed in the Chapter Eight were *Flaming* (1986), *Dancing DNA* (1994) and *Forgotten Past* (1994). All three works, unlike those discussed in Chapter Seven, were based on western dance codes: the first being an example of modern dance while the other two are ballets. As such, none of these works share a National Dance preoccupation with preserving tradition. To this end, the concern in Chapter Eight was to what extent these works can be read as a more balanced (less propagandist and less sentimental) approach to the need for an intercultural Korean



dance practice. Moreover, as all three works were performed in Korea by Korean dancers, attention was paid to what impact this had on the two western dance vocabularies used.

The outcome of this strategy, it was suggested, saw the 'sophistication' of a previously over-simplistic understanding of interculturalism. In other words, and by making comparisons with evidence taken from the analysis of Lee's *Salpuri 9*, rather than attempting to amalgamate otherwise heterogeneous dance codes under the rubric of a political motivation, a more dialogical approach was considered. Furthermore, and due to differences in the latent potency (and cultural 'baggage') of various performance codes, an 'even-playing field' is an impossible to construct. In other words, it is not possible to either theorise upon or 'formulate' an intercultural approach to performance without addressing points at which cultures, and their practices, differ.

In Chapter Nine, and drawing upon this notion of a dialogical approach to the creation of an intercultural model of dance practice, two works created and premiered in Britain, *Movement Experience* (1999) and *O* (2000), were analysed. These works were based upon the drawing together and adaptation of two distinct and contrasting dance techniques; namely 'western' contact improvisation and 'traditional' Korean dance.

Unlike Korean-based investigations into the development of an 'intercultural' dance practice, the concern with 'fusion' was replaced by one with dialogical processes.

Rather than trying to produce a homogenous entity, in other words, the impetus was with creating a performance dynamic through explorations of contrast/ difference and

opposition. Instead of trying to 'detach' dance codes from their socio-political and historical legacy (an ultimately impossible task) and impose upon the performance a pre-determined 'will' to educate and illuminate, a less didactic and more dialogic strategy was explored. Furthermore, it was in *O* rather than *Movement Experience*, that this specific 'take' on interculturalism was more fully expressed.

Perhaps one of the most significant changes in thinking that occurred due to the move from Korea to Britain was a shift away from a pro-Nationalist (and 'modernist') ideology wherein everything was read as it corresponded to an 'either or' framework and towards a more pluralist (postmodern) agenda. As a result, to reject all western influences in dance no longer seems either necessary or even relevant in order to 'reclaim' a Korean dance culture. Rather, what is more important is to continue to search for, and utilise, Korean characteristics that have previously been occluded by a postcolonial investment in Eurocentric practices.

All of the choreographers, whose works were investigated in this thesis, have sought to maintain a non-hierarchic interaction between indigenous and western codes. As has been suggested, not all of them have been successful. This does not necessarily mean that such excursions are without value but, rather, that the point at which a Korean dance culture can be celebrated for both its indigenous identity and intercultural appeal has yet to be fully realised. The practices and theories explored in this thesis, in some small way, are presented in the hope of bringing such a moment a little closer.

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